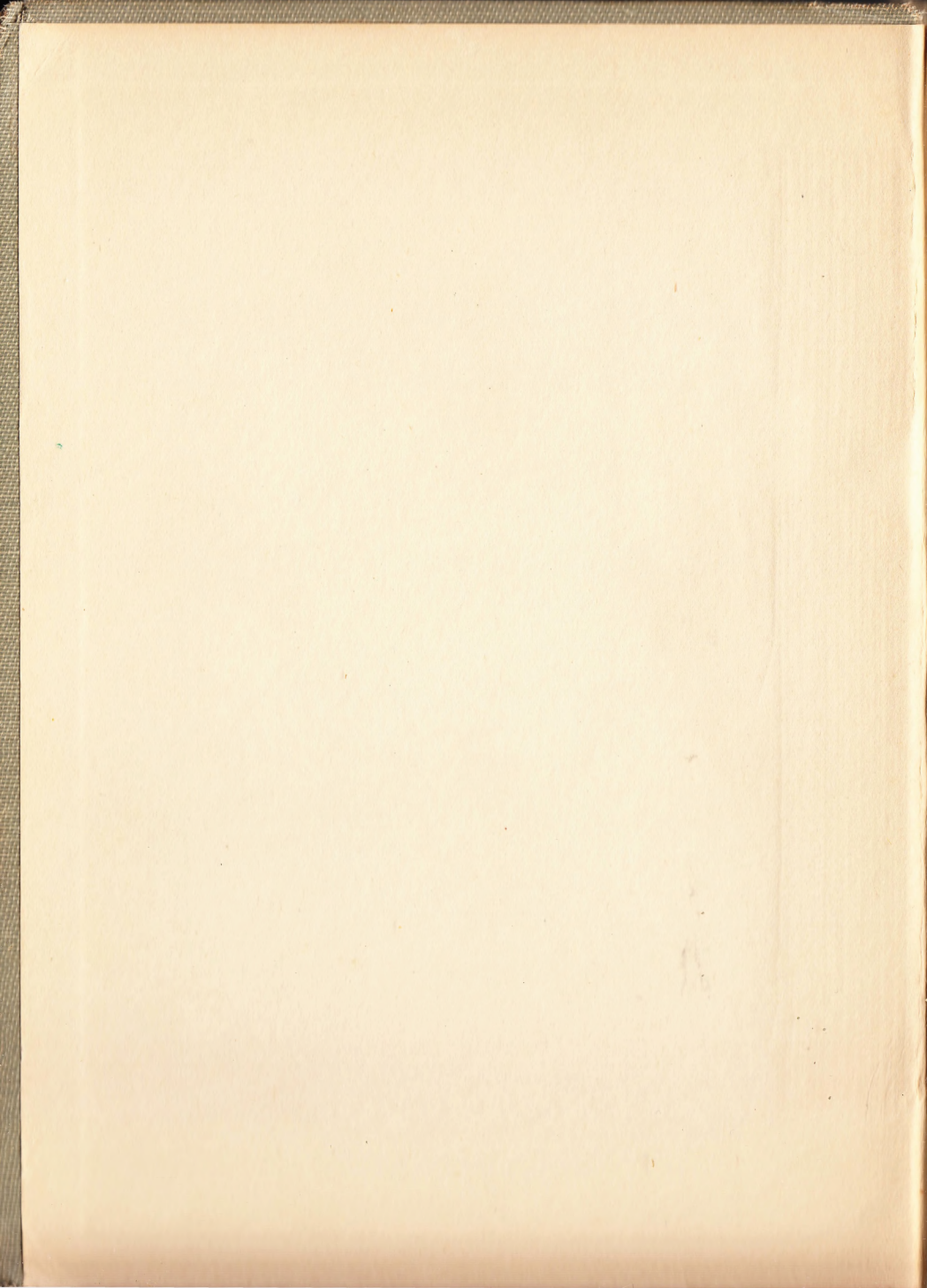


Winona's War Farm



Margaret Widdemer



Done Buck
from
Sunday School
Perfect Attendance

2



THE GIRLS WERE PROWLING AROUND THE HOUSE BY THIS TIME, LOOK-
ING IN AT THE WINDOWS

WINONA'S WAR FARM

BY MARGARET WIDDEMER

AUTHOR OF

"Winona of Camp Karonya," "Winona of the
Camp Fire," "Winona's Way."



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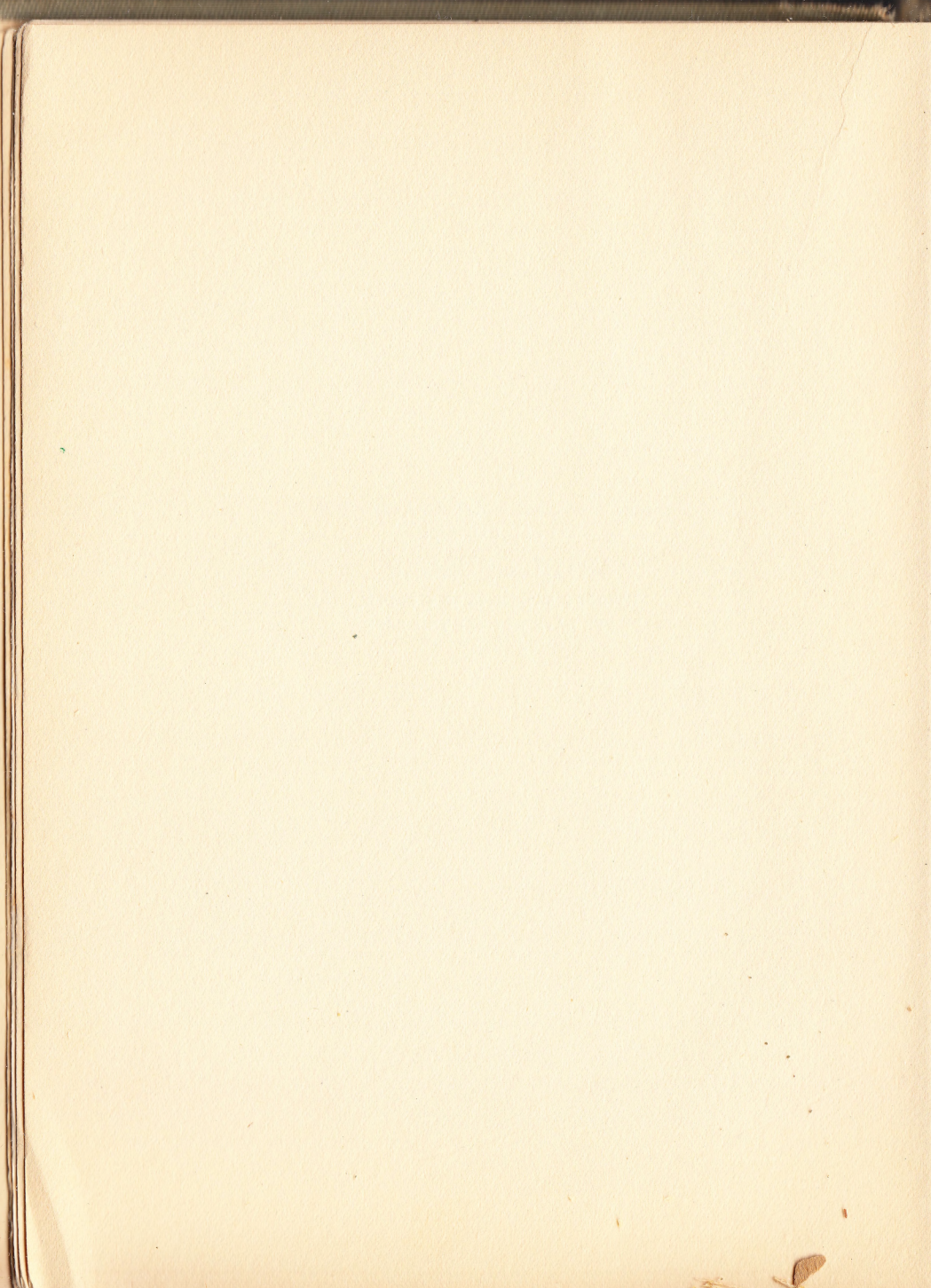
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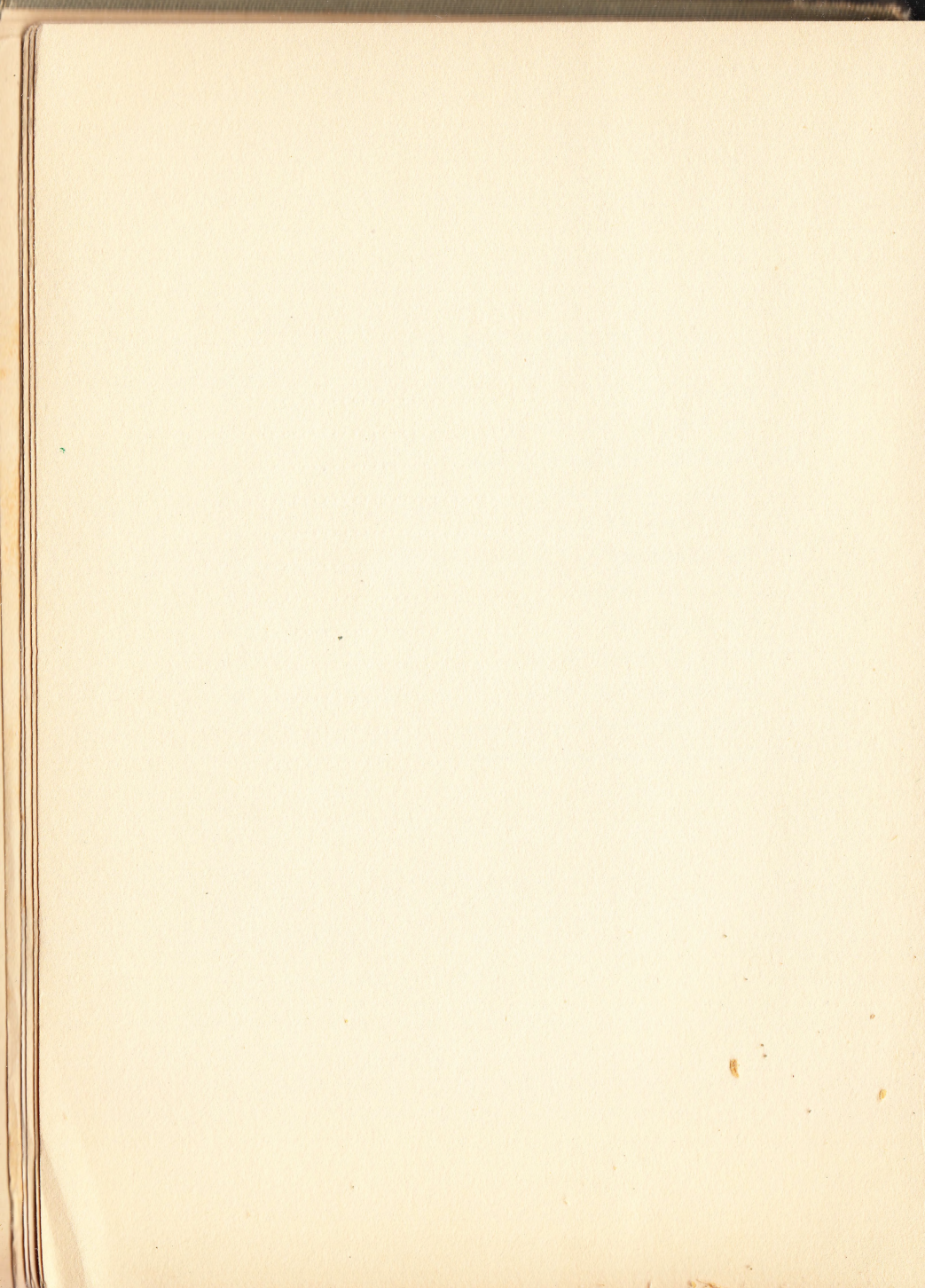
TO MY COUSIN
ARTHUR BURGER

WITHOUT WHOSE HELP I COULD
NEVER HAVE WRITTEN THIS BOOK



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WINONA'S WAR FARM

CHAPTER ONE

WE GO IN

It was on a Good Friday that it happened. They always remembered it that way, because—it seemed like a very small thing to start to remember it by—Winona Merriam had been up early, making hot cross buns for the family.

After breakfast, the leisurely breakfast of holidays, they all went off to church.

There were three Merriam children, Tom, who was the oldest, and the two girls, Winona, who was fifteen and a half, and little Florence. As they came out of church they heard the boys shouting extras.

"They never shout so you can hear what it's about," observed Florence, who was on ahead.

"If they did," her sister explained to her practically, "you wouldn't want to buy the paper."

"I think that's mean," said Florence.

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But Tom and his father were much more concerned to know what was going on.

"Here, I'll run ahead and get a paper, dad," said Tom. "Got a nickel?"

His father handed him a dime, and he dashed ahead.

"Shouldn't wonder if it was the war," he threw back to his sister over his shoulder. "We've been going in any time these last few weeks."

"Oh, goody, goody!" squealed Florence. "Wouldn't it be great fun to have a real war, here—mother do you suppose they'll come over here an' fight us?"

She showed signs of beginning to pirouette on the pavement.

Her mother looked grave.

"You must not talk that way, Florence," she said. "We had to go in, but it isn't anything to rejoice over."

Winona slipped her hand into her mother's as they walked along.

"But we did right to go in," she reminded her mother. "Don't you think we did?"

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"We ought to have gone in when the Lusitania was sunk," said her mother. "This is better late than never. But——"

She shuddered a little. Her own boy was too young to go, but she could not help thinking of the mothers whose boys were of fighting age.

Winona, whose sunny spirits were never long down, tossed back her curly brown head, and laughed a little.

"I see one thing," she said, "more work for Camp Karonya!"

Winona was one of the three girls who did the most to make their Camp Fire, which they called Camp Karonya, an enthusiastic and hardworking organization. In the winter just past they had successfully carried through a pageant which had commenced as a Camp Fire affair, but which had eventually embraced the townspeople. They were resting on their laurels now.

The town that Winona Merriam lived in had been there since the days of the Revolution, and there had never been a war that it had not sent its quota of men. Winona's father had gone through the Spanish war,

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and her grandfather had been a drummer-boy in the war between the North and South. But those wars, somehow, had seemed story-book things—things that happened to other people, not to you. Even the Great War over in Europe, depressing as it had been, and closely as it had seemed to come at times, had, after all, not been really *here*.

She walked on quietly by little Florence, wondering. The war was here—it didn't seem real that it was here, but it was.

"Now what?" she said aloud.

"I hope prices won't go up any more," said her mother prosaically, breaking into her thoughts.

"They've been bad enough as it was."

"Adelaide Hughes said she was going to can an extra lot of things this spring and summer, so that she'd have them for the winter," Winona answered absently.

"We must, too," answered her mother.

They went on for some time after that without talking much more.

Presently they came to the Merriam house. It was a very pretty frame house, with a deep front lawn

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and an ample back yard, just now brown and with a few sticks coming up out of the flower-beds. Later there would be flowers—little green shoots were sticking up already—that were going to be crocuses and snowdrops. Over the lawn were careering a colored boy and a brown dog.

“What has that dog got?” demanded Mrs. Merriam.

“Puppums is certainly getting too old for these little girlish tricks,” declared Winona. “I believe it’s Clay’s best shoe!”

Clay was a colored boy whom the Children’s Aid Society had presented to Mrs. Merriam the year before, when she had written in for a girl to help with the housework. After the first shock of astonishment the family had settled down with him, and he with them, very placidly. He was very much of a male Topsy to begin with, but this year, much older and taller, and the proud possessor of wages and Tom’s outgrown stiff collars, he was beginning to be quite a flourishing “colored gemman.” The sight of him chasing the dog over the lawn, his lately acquired dignity lost, rather pleased Winona.

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"He got mah shoe!" proclaimed Clay aggrievedly, hopping toward them. "Meanest ole dog I ever saw! Waited 'till ah got my one shoe on, an' off he put with the other one! How he 'spect me to chase him, one shoe off an' one on?"

"Oh, he doesn't care," grinned Tom, coming up. "He'd rather keep the shoe. Why, Clay, you idiot, take off the other shoe, and chase him in your bare feet or another pair!"

Clay stopped short, and a light came over his countenance. He had a great admiration for Tom.

"Ah certn'ly never did think of that," he said. So he sat down exactly where he was, and began to unlace the other shoe. At which Puppums, the valued brown family mongrel, came confidingly up with the missing one, and offered it to Clay with an amiable wag of his tail.

The family shrieked with laughter. Clay took it with dignity, and laced it on.

"You see," said Tom between gasps, "all you had to do was to take my advice, Clay."

"Yessah, your advice is mos' generally good," granted Clay. "I'll wear these yere to Sunday-school.

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Miss Winona, there's people wantin' to see you in the parlor."

Winona dashed in.

"Oh, Louise, Helen, are you going to stay to dinner? Do!" she begged, as two girls rose from the living-room sofa to greet her.

"We aren't," said the taller of them, Helen Bryan, coming toward her. "We can't. Nannie sent me over to tell you something, and Louise came with me."

Louise Lane, red-haired and irrepressibly cheerful, nodded.

"I thought I'd better see that she got the message right," she corroborated.

"Glad to see you, anyway," said Winona.

Louise Lane was, as was Winona herself, a Torch-bearer, and a leader in the Camp Karonya activities. Helen Bryan was quieter, slower and shyer, and rather artistic in her tastes. She was the stepdaughter of Camp Karonya's Guardian, Mrs. Bryan, and she and Winona and Louise were an inseparable trio. Louise was a human dynamo, who, as she herself said, usually fired the balls Winona made. Helen painted and drew

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and stenciled her curtains and ornamented her room furniture, and said very little. But if she was not to be anywhere that the other two went they felt a distinct loss. As Louise said, "You never realized how much you were going to miss her till she wasn't there."

"What's the message?" Winona wanted to know.

"You're to pass the word around to anybody you see that there will be a business meeting to-morrow night," said Louise. "But Opeechee wanted to make sure before she appointed that time that all the Torch-bearers could be there. Marie Hunter can, and so can I. But we didn't know about you."

"Certainly I can," Winona told them. "But what is it—about the Pageant money, or what Roger sent us?"

"A little of both, I think, in with other things," said Helen. "You know we haven't really decided what to do with that money? It really seems wrong to take money from England just now."

The money they spoke of was a reward that had been sent over to be divided between the Camp Fire Girls and the Boy Scouts, in return for some kind offices

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they had performed for an English Boy Scout, Roger Mendon—Sir Roger, as he had finally turned out to be. They had found him in a starving condition, and, from the effects of a wound in France, unable to remember his name, or anything very much about himself except that he was English, and had been a Boy Scout on duty in France. They had accepted his story unquestioningly, Tom, Winona, Louise, and Tom's chum, Billy Lee, and had promptly brought him home and made him comfortable, and found him work that he could do. Then, by a lucky chance Winona had seen the advertisement for him in an old copy of the *Times*, and her answer to it had brought his uncle over for him.

The Camp Fire had made some little protest against taking the money which had been advertised as a reward, but finally had agreed to accept it, with the understanding that it was to be used to forward something that would help others.

"All right, I'll be there," said Winona. "What about the Blue Birds?"

"Oh, it's a heap big meeting," Louise explained. "The other Camp Fire is to be there, too. All the

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Blue Birds. Opeechee seems to have something most tremendous big up her ceremonial sleeve. I think she'd take the Boy Scouts if she could get 'em."

"I wonder if it has anything to do with the war being declared?" mused Winona.

Louise's eyes—the vivid blue eyes that go with vividly red hair—danced.

"I'm as sure of it as I can be of anything I don't know about," she said. "I wonder what it is. Maybe she's going to raise a regiment of us to go to the front! I know I'd make as good a soldier as many a forlorn little National Guardsman I've seen tripping by. They say women do go in Russia."

She rose and began to march up and down the room, whistling "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag" in time to her pace. "I'm a well-grown, husky young person," said she. "The doctor told me once—I'd burned my wrist or something—that he wished half his men patients had my rude health. I'd *love* a trench."

"I wouldn't," said womanly Winona, and shivered. "I've been hearing lectures about them. They have various disadvantages that you're forgetting, Lou."

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"I know—I do like bathtubs, and they say they aren't prevalent in the first-line trenches. Anyway, I can knit. I have two sweaters done for some branch of the service—I forget which. The one the Red Cross told about."

"I've only had time for one and a half so far," acknowledged Helen.

Winona had done two, and said so.

"Do you know, I think I can guess what it is," she said suddenly. "I believe she wants to talk to us about going in with the Red Cross and being an auxiliary branch—dropping the Camp Fire activities for the present. It does seem as if we ought to do something like that."

"M—yes," said Louise, hesitatingly. "Only—I don't know—I want to do something more special, somehow—something that Red Crosses couldn't do. There ought to be something."

"I have a feeling in my bones that there will be," said Winona. "Don't you know a thing, Helen?"

"Nothing except that Opeechee and Miss Dustin had a long powwow last night. You know this war's been coming on forever. And they said something

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about the Scouts. You know how Opeechee is. She's so afraid of not being fair to the rest of the girls that she tells me less Camp Fire affairs than she does anyone else."

"Poor Helen," said Louise, springing on Helen and engulfing her in a wild embrace, at her somewhat aggrieved tone. "She just does treat you like a dog, she does! We ought to take up a collection or something for you."

Helen looked a little ashamed of herself.

"I suppose it's only fair," she acknowledged. "And really Nannie is a dear."

"She certainly is!" said Winona enthusiastically. "And I shall try to get what I can out of Tom. If the Scouts are in it he may know."

"Yes, see what you can do," said Louise. "Meanwhile, I'll go home and set up another sweater, and get some done before I go to school Monday. Queer how I always want to knit on Sunday."

They went, and Winona herself went slowly upstairs to take off the dress she had worn to church, and put on something less good. The Merriams were not rich, and since everything had gone up in price,

WE GO IN

they were all trying to be as careful as possible of expenses. As she slipped off her frock and put on another she began to wonder in her mind about Adelaide Hughes, one of the Camp Fire Girls. Adelaide's father made less money than Mr. Merriam did, and they had just the same family as the Merriam's, two girls and a boy. When Winona had first known Adelaide she had been very unhappy because she could not keep up with the other girls, but in the year she had been working with them she had learned to do various things to earn money, among them preserving; and was in a fair way to do a flourishing business with jellies and jams. But as prices were now Winona wondered if Adelaide was going to be able to go on making money.

The family was discussing war when she got to the table—war and prices.

"They say that this time next year wheat flour will be practically impossible to get," her mother was saying.

"Oh, we'll hope the war will be over by that time," said Tom off-handedly. "When we once get in——"

"We'll take quite a while to get out again," finished his father for him, dryly. "Don't count on that, my boy—this is going to be a big war for us, as it has been for the rest of the world."

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"Tom, do you know anything about what the meeting of Camp Karonya is for to-morrow night?" asked Winona. "Helen says she thinks the Scouts are in it."

"All I can tell you is that our Scoutmaster is calling us to a meeting, too," said Tom. "I hadn't any idea you girls were going to have anything to do with it at all."

"Well, we'll find out in a little while," said Winona resignedly. "But I do wish I knew!"

Tom passed his plate for another piece of chicken.

"For one thing, we are to decide what is to be done with the money Roger Mendon halved between us and the Camp Fire Girls," he informed her.

"Why, so are we!" said his sister.

"Important if true," said Tom.

Winona could hardly wait for the evening to come. The war was on—that was the principal thing in her mind—and here was Camp Karonya, and Camp Karonya simply *must* do everything it could to help!

There were thirteen of the older girls, and seven younger ones, sisters and friends of sisters of Camp Fire Girls. Winona and her friends ranged from six-

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teen to thirteen, and the little girls were around eight and nine. She wondered, as she waited for her friends the evening of the meeting, how they could all give the most help.

The meeting was held at the house of Mrs. Bryan, their Guardian. Louise came in to go with Winona, as Helen was already at home.

There was an atmosphere of expectancy about all the girls, and not so much frolicking as usual, even among the Blue Birds. Marie Hunter, who was in charge of these younger girls, was not so much on the alert as usual.

Mrs. Bryan, or Opeechee—as was her Camp Fire name—was a pretty, capable-looking woman under thirty, not in the least the stepmother of the fairy-tales. She and Helen were great friends, and got on more like sisters, or cousins, than like stepmother and stepdaughter. To-night when the girls came in Mrs. Bryan was sitting at a little table with Helen beside her, helping to arrange papers. It all looked very business-like.

After the routine had been gone through, there was a pause of expectancy. The girls sat waiting to find

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out just what was to come next, but nobody quite liked to be the first to ask.

"Well, girls?" inquired Mrs. Bryan finally, smiling at them a little. "You want to know why the meeting was called, don't you?"

"We certainly do," answered tall, quiet Marie Hunter. "It's about the war, isn't it?"

Mrs. Bryan nodded.

"Yes, it's about the war. To begin with, girls, how many of you have thought, already, what you could do?"

A babble of voices answered.

"Yes indeed!"

"I've been planning ever so many things!"

"Red Cross work——"

"First Aid——"

Mrs. Bryan laughed and put her hands over her ears.

"Gently, gently, girls! Not more than three at a time."

The other Guardian, Miss Dustin, spoke here, for her Camp.

"We've been drilling and doing target practice, as

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you know. Camp Wah-wah-tay-see has promised the local Red Cross to work with it all summer. That, with the drills, will keep us pretty busy."

Louise Lane whispered irreverently to Winona.

"I don't want to seem snippy about our sister Camp," she said, "but what in the name of goodness do they think they're doing for the country having fancy drills?"

"Well, Miss Dustin is a gymnasium teacher," whispered charitable Winona in reply. "They'll look awfully well in the Memorial Day parade."

Louise reached over her shoulder for one of the two long, heavy red-gold braids that she usually held fast to when she thought; then remembering that she had put up her hair a month or two before, tried to look unconcerned and pretend she was merely feeling for a hairpin.

"Have a rope," offered Winona, and the two began to giggle.

"I don't care," Louise went on in a whisper that was none the less vehement for being suppressed. "I think drills *aren't* any help."

"Suppose all the men were in France, and all the women——" began Winona teasingly.

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"What is your idea about helping, Louise?" came Mrs. Bryan's calm voice. As her girls said with pride, you had to get up very early in the morning to get away with anything from Opeechee.

Louise, cross-legged on the floor in true Camp fashion, caught her breath, then answered as calmly as her Guardian had asked.

"Giving aid and comfort to the soldiers—helping the people the soldiers leave behind, if they need help—doing all we can for the Allies."

There was a low sound of applause from the girls.

"That sounds as if you all thought so, too, girls," said Mrs. Bryan.

"What else could anybody think?" said Miss Dustin generously. "That's our idea in promising the Red Cross to work with it."

"That will rather tie up Camp Wah-wah-tay-see," said Mrs. Bryan to her fellow-guardian in a lower voice.

"Yes, but with the Scouts and your girls there'll be enough without us," Miss Dustin answered in the same low tone. "Just as well we should have a roving commission."

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"I suppose you're right," answered Mrs. Bryan.
"Only I feel selfish——"

"You needn't," Miss Dustin assured her. "To begin with, Wah-wah-tay-see hasn't specialized in home-craft as your girls have. Besides, there are more of them who can't be spared from home."

The two camps were paralyzed with curiosity as this dialogue went on, and listening without disguise.

"You might as well tell us, you know, Opeechee dear," said Winona, voicing the sentiment of the rest of the girls. "If you and Miss Dustin talk it over much longer without letting us know what it's all about—well, I don't know what will happen!"

"Here it is then," said Mrs. Bryan, turning to face the roomful of girls who were all over the floor and chairs. "How many of my camp were planning to go off and camp on the river this year, as we did last?"

"We all were!" came the chorus of voices.

"And Camp Wah-wah-tay-see can't—not many of the girls, that is," said Sophie Burns, one of that camp.

"That was what Miss Dustin and I were discussing," said Mrs. Bryan, "because there's an opportunity

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for the Camp Fire Girls to do something that would help a lot; only they will have to leave home for the summer to do it."

The girls listened anxiously.

"Mr. Gedney, the Scoutmaster," she went on, "has been offered, through a friend, the use of a big farm, not far from where we camped. There are one hundred and twenty-one acres of tillable land, and some woodland and pasturage besides. He hasn't been able to get labor for it for the past two years, so it has stood idle, though it's good fertile ground, he says. Now the one thing, everyone tells us, that the world is going to stand in need of, is food, and especially wheat. So if Mr. Gedney's twenty-four Scouts, and the fourteen of us from Camp Karonya——"

"What about us Blue Birds?" demanded a voice.
"We can work as well as if we were big girls!"

Mrs. Bryan looked over to the corner where little Frances Hughes, the speaker, sat with a group of the smaller girls.

"You can help a good deal," she said, "if your mothers are willing you should come, too."

"I haven't any mother," said Frances, with, it is

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to be feared, a little triumph in her voice. She and her elder sister kept house for their father and brother, Adelaide, who was fifteen nearly, being mistress of the little household.

Bessie Lane and Florence Merriam, one each side of her, pulled her down and began an animated discussion in undertones.

"What is your pleasure, Daughters of the Camp Fire?" asked Mrs. Bryan. "Do you care to undertake this work? For it won't be all good times, like your last year's camping trip. It will be hard, solid work, all through the summer. The Scouts will do most of the plowing and sowing, but there will be work on the land for all of you, and a great deal of canning and preserving."

Winona, Louise, and Marie, who were the three Torchbearers, drew together and talked for a moment.

Then Winona, as spokeswoman, lifted her head.

"It doesn't seem to be a question of whether it's fun or not," she said. "If we can do it I think we ought to. So do Louise and Marie. But I'm sure it *will* be fun," she added, laughing.

The other girls spoke up.

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"We'd love to do it," they said, "all of us."

"So would we," said Sophie a little plaintively for the other camp. "But perhaps we'll get some farming to do anyway," she added brightening. "There's going to be a lot of extra help needed, they say."

"No fear but that we can all find plenty to do," said Miss Dustin cheerfully.

"Then shall we say," Mrs. Bryan asked her camp, "that if your parents are all willing, we will undertake our share of the work of running this farm?"

The camp agreed enthusiastically. There was very little danger of the parents not being willing. They all knew and trusted Mrs. Bryan, and the effects of the girls' six weeks camping trip last year had been so good that there was to have been another this year anyway. And as Helen said thoughtfully, it was only a little longer at both ends than the camping trip had been.

"Then that settles what is going to happen to the five hundred apiece Roger sent us and the Scouts," she added.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Adelaide Hughes.

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"I see," interposed Winona. "We'll need it for stock and—and silos and things. What *is* a silo, anyhow?" she interrupted herself to ask.

"We'll find out all too soon, dear heart," Louise told her briskly.

"Not too soon for me!" said Winona bravely. And so said they all.

"Oh, it's going to be *heaps* of fun!" broke out Louise. "I always wanted to be an agriculturette, and now I'm going to!"

CHAPTER TWO

THE FARM BY THE RIVER

"You see," Winona and Florence and Tom explained very nearly all at once to their father and mother, "the farm needs labor, and with all of us working at it, we can raise more even than a real staff could."

"Staff?" inquired Mr. Merriam. "Do farmers have staffs?"

"Well, set of help," said Winona, whose word it had been, undaunted.

"What about your school work?" asked Mrs. Merriam.

"We are to be let off from school for as much of the time as we need now," Winona answered, "and altogether, later. You see, Mr. Gedney being the vice-principal makes things a lot easier. Oh, father, mother—can't we go? It will be all the fun in the world."

"I think we ought to let you go," said their father thoughtfully, "whether it is fun or not. I suppose we

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can trust your guardian and Mr. Gedney not to let you work too hard."

"Of course, you can!" said Winona radiantly.

So the Tuesday following, Louise Lane's father as usual contributed his big car, and Louise, Tom, Billy Lee and Winona, together with Mrs. Bryan and Helen, piled into it and drove off to find what Louise described as the "scene of their future toil."

It was not as far as they had expected.

"Why, we've been here!" exclaimed Winona as they turned into a road that wound about a field, and finally drove up against a barn. "This is near where the Martins lived last year, when we were camping."

"I bought eggs once of somebody here," supplemented Louise.

"That's no help," Helen answered. "If it was one of the places where you *didn't* buy eggs, it might help us out!"

"Well, I did sample pretty much all the neighborhoods I could find," admitted Louise. "It was more fun than buying them of the same old hens every time."

"And now we're going to raise our own eggs,"

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said Winona, with a little frisk of joy as she climbed out of the car. The others followed her, and Mrs. Bryan produced an enormous key.

"This is the great and wonderful door-key," she said rather superfluously.

"Nice little toy," commented Billy Lee. "Doesn't look much like fitting the Yale locks at home."

"It's an old house," his chum answered him.

"Gee, I should say it was!" said Billy. "Biggest I've seen since I came North. I've seen some on deserted plantations in the South that were like it."

The girls were prowling around the house by this time, looking in at the windows.

"Oh, I see a fireplace!" cried Winona.

"And there's another one on this side!" Louise called back, from a window around a corner. "And—oh, girls, I believe there's antique furniture! I can see the corner of something big made of mahogany."

Helen, who was older, and had a taste for most artistic things, gave a squeal at this.

"Mahogany! Nonsense!" she said. "Do you think they'd offer to let a crew of imps like the Blue Birds, not to speak of *us*, camp all over good antique furniture? You're seeing things, Louise!"

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"I'm not," said Louise doggedly.

"You remember that time you ate all the fudge, and had a dream, and woke up and said you'd seen a big black man running off with the fireless cooker——" began Winona.

"No, I don't," Louise answered, continuing to peer in at the window. "I make it a point never to remember painful things like that. And anyway, he hadn't."

"The point is, that he didn't exist," said Helen.

She, too, was looking in at the window. "That isn't antique furniture."

"Well, what is it, then?" Louise demanded.

"I don't know. Maybe it's a beehive or a chicken-coop. I'm sure——"

What she was sure of was cut short by the interruption of the boys around the corner.

"See here!" they called. "What's the idea of staring in at the windows when you can walk in the front door?"

"It's just the way Winnie always opens a letter," Tom added. "Looks it all over, top and bottom, and wonders who it's from, and never thinks to open it to find out."

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"I didn't think," said Winona, laughing at herself.

"Well, neither did any of us," said Louise.

"Question is, do you ever," teased Tom.

Louise grinned good-naturedly.

"Every once in a while," she answered, "which is more than you do."

"Oh, come on!" Helen called back from around the corner of the house. "There's lots to see!"

They dashed after her, and in at the big front door.

"But this isn't a farmhouse!" exclaimed Winona.

"No, it isn't," said Mrs. Bryan matter-of-factly.

"It doesn't pretend to be. It's the old manor-house that was built on the estate, not very long after the Revolution."

"Manor-house?" they all demanded in a breath.
"We thought it was a farm."

"So it is a farm," she said, "or rather, it has a farm. It has been the property of the same people nearly always. Sometimes they farmed it and sometimes they didn't. Lately it's been 'didn't.' But nobody has lived in this house for a long time, thirty years or so. It's too big."

"How big?" asked Winona, stopping in mid-

THE FARM BY THE RIVER

career, from where she had been racing across the floor to investigate a long tarnished gilt mirror that stood between two windows, and reached from floor to ceiling.

"There are twenty rooms altogether," said Mrs. Bryan serenely. "That's one reason why it hasn't been lived in. It was too hard to heat."

"But in summer?" asked Helen.

"Oh, in summer the people that own it are usually off yachting. And the farmers they have hired have preferred to live in the farmhouse."

"Farmhouse?" asked the boys. They were interested, because that was where they were to live.

"It's newer, and has more modern improvements," said Mrs. Bryan. "The cooking will have to be done in its kitchen. I have the key to that, too."

"Let's hurry up and go over this, then," said Winona. "Oh, isn't it gorgeous!"

It was indeed a wonderful old house. Downstairs there was the long parlor where they were standing, a parlor which went from front to back on one side of the house, a library, living room, and kitchen on the other side. A wide hall ran through the middle, with

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wide, shallow stairs winding up from it to the floor above.

"Anyway," said Helen, lingering, "I was right about the old furniture. This is good furniture, isn't it, Nannie?"

"I hadn't noticed," said her stepmother, pausing. "The owners told Mr. Gedney that a lot of old stuff had been left here, and that we could use it if we liked."

"It *is*!" said Helen triumphantly. "Look here. It's exactly like the picture of an old mahogany high-boy in our old-furniture book, only it isn't polished, and needs putting together here, where it's come apart. And I believe this is the head of a mahogany bedstead. And——"

"But what good will it all do us?" demanded Louise practically. "We can't keep beans in it, or whatever it is we're out here to grow."

"I don't care," said Helen dreamily. "I want to do something about it."

"You shall," said Winona soothingly. "You can be thinking what to do all the time you're going over the rest of the house. Come along now, or we'll never get to the other house."

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They dragged her away, still casting hungry looks of admiration back at the furniture, to inspect the upstairs rooms. There were, as Tom said, "bedrooms to burn," high-ceiling, old-fashioned rooms with paper that had evidently not been renewed since the last occupant had lived there.

"Sixteen bedrooms," said Mrs. Bryan, thoughtfully. "And there are twenty of us, altogether. That's ample room."

"We have our cots from last year's camping," Winona added, "and we can make dressers out of boxes, as we did then. We don't really need any other furniture."

"Only—how are we going to wash?" demanded Louise, practically.

"There don't seem to be any great amount of stationary washstands," admitted Helen, looking about her at the dusty, unfurnished room they stood in.

The other girls laughed.

"Write to the government at Washington," suggested Winona. "Tell the Great White Father that if he puts in sixteen bathtubs we'll help run the farm."

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"There is one bathtub," put in Mrs. Bryan. "It's tin, and not as young as it might be, but it's there."

"How did there come to be such a thing?" asked Louise.

She sat down on a wide window-sill and pushed her red hair off her forehead. Her face was flushed with running all about the big house, and the chill of it seemed not to have affected her at all. Helen, who was slenderer and more affected by heat and cold, shivered a little.

"This house is damp," she said. "But it isn't like a house that hasn't been lived in for thirty years. How *did* there come to be a tub, Nannie?"

"Oh, there have been caretakers, and once or twice it has been rented for the summer," her stepmother answered. "The man and his wife who had charge of running the farm have always had charge of the house, too, and seen to it that there were fires lighted whenever it was necessary. As for the bathtub—why, people had them thirty years ago, though you children don't seem to think so. But we'll have to make more comprehensive washing arrangements than that. If we were nearer the river we could bathe there, as we

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did last year. As it is—well, see if you can think, girls.”

“We’re going down to look at the house we have to live in, while you think,” said Billy. “It’s just at the turn of the lane here. All these bedrooms look just like all the rest, as far as I can see.”

“I’ll go with you,” Louise offered joyfully.

Helen and Winona preferred to go over the rest of the house—room after room, any of them large enough for two people, and chilly enough now to prove how cool they would be in the heat of summer. The house was built as houses are not built any more, walls thick, ceilings high, foundations deep—a house that it would take a cannon to knock over.

“It feels as if all sorts of wonderful things had happened here,” said Winona. “Think of all the wonderful things that must have gone on here since it was built! People must have been born and married and died here. I read a book the other day that said people left sort of marks of themselves on rooms they had lived in if anything very exciting had happened to them, impressions that people who lived there afterwards could get. Do you think that is so, Opeechee?”

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Mrs. Bryan looked thoughtful.

"I do think that some houses have a happier feel than others," she admitted. "And I remember when I was about eighteen my mother took a house that depressed us all so we didn't know what to do."

"Oh, was there a ghost?" Helen wanted to know excitedly.

Her stepmother shook her head.

"Oh, no," she smiled. "None that we ever heard of. It was Winona's theory that I was backing up. We *did* hear that the woman who had lived in it for a lifetime before us had been a scold, and made the life of her whole family miserable!"

"How awfully interesting!" said Winona, her eyes sparkling. "I love that idea. Then if she'd been as nice as she could be, there would have been a feeling of niceness and cheerfulness in that house, and everybody would have been cheered up."

"Exactly," answered Mrs. Bryan.

Winona laughed.

"When I get home I'm going to try it. I'm going to pick out one spot in the house to always go and be mournful in, and then I'm going to take people up and see if they feel it."

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"You won't have any time to be mournful," Helen reminded her, "if we work this farm this summer."

"I may," retorted Winona, "if nothing I plant comes up."

They had gone faithfully through all the rooms by this time, tentatively assigning them to the various girls. They put all the younger girls by themselves this year, instead of having them scattered among older sisters.

"It will be more fun for the Blue Birds," Mrs. Bryan said very wisely, "and they're old enough to begin to govern themselves, with Marie's help."

"I wonder if it will be more fun for Marie?" hinted Winona.

"More something," said Helen. "What do you think that queer little square place was, high up in the cellar wall?"

"That sunken spot?" Winona answered. "Why, I don't know—a place for the gas, maybe, or a cat-hole."

"They wouldn't board up a cat-hole, and white-wash it, and the gas is in the other end of the cellar," Helen replied, as she bent down to brush a cobweb,

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acquired in the same cellar, from the bottom of her skirt.

"Oh, it's doubtless a secret passage. Probably it's full of gold, with a skeleton or so on top," said Winona cheerfully.

"Splendid shelf-room for cans," said Helen, changing the subject.

"M'hm," Winona answered. "And the table near it is big enough to hold a gas-stove, and there's a pipe near. Adelaide ought to see it."

Adelaide Hughes had specialized on canning more than the other girls had, and it had been decided that she was to take charge of that end of the work. She was to have all the help she needed, of course.

"They say in the papers that we can dry fruit and vegetables, too," Helen went on. "I wonder if she knows about that."

"Somebody else might take up that end," Winona said thoughtfully.

"I might," said Helen. "But oh, Winona, the very first thing I do I want to find out who owns all that old furniture, and if they are fond of it why they're letting it go to rack and ruin the way they are,

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and if they don't want it what they'd sell it to a deserving Camp Fire for."

"You *are* getting to be a business person!" said Winona admiringly. "But what on earth would the Camp Fire do with it when it had it? We are going to need every scrap of the money Roger's mother sent us as a reward for finding him, to buy seeds and fertilizers, and hire instruments. Tom said so."

"Instruments?" inquired Helen blankly, as they hurried to catch up with the boys and Louise, and Mrs. Bryan, who had gone on ahead.

"Not an orchestra, goosie!" said Winona. "Things to plow and harrow with, and—and whatever else you do."

"Dear me, it does seem like a big thing for a lot of kids to tackle!" said Helen dismayedly. "I don't know how to plow and harrow."

"You don't have to," said Tom, whom they had caught up to by this. "We do—or we will when Mr. Gedney shows us. All you'll have to do will be—let's see, what is it farmeresses do? Oh, all the cooking and all the cleaning and all the washing and mending and dairying and canning, and a little weeding

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and sowing and hoeing in your leisure moments."

"And then we'll go crazy. I've heard about it, too," said Louise. "Well, we *may* do all that, but anyway, there are a lot of us, and only one poor farmer's wife."

Mr. Gedney came up here.

"I think sleeping-quarters are provided for, Mrs. Bryan," he said cheerfully. "My wife and I will sleep in the farmhouse here, and there is room, too, for about a third of the boys. The rest will set up their tents nearby."

"And are we to do the washing for all of you?" demanded Louise.

"We hadn't thought of expecting it," Mr. Gedney hastened to assure her.

Louise looked thoughtful.

"It would save money, wouldn't it?" she asked.

"Of course," said Mrs. Bryan. "But don't undertake too much, Louise. We are going to work this summer."

"We have a washing-machine at home, that I'm quite sure mother would donate to the cause of patriotism," she said, "and I'm going to borrow it, and see

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if we can't do our own washing for one week, anyhow! There's a laundry stove down cellar (there's as much room in that cellar as there is in most houses), and I saw a wash-boiler, and there's heaps of room to dry the clothes. There wouldn't be any amount of ironing if we mangled them. Are the boys going to work in uniform?" she broke off to ask Mr. Gedney.

Mr. Gedney looked at her with respect.

"No indeed," he answered briskly. "Overalls, every last one of them, and light-weight flannel shirts."

"We can manage that," said Louise decisively. "I always liked washing, and with a well-trained Blue Bird or so——"

"Well, we'll see," said Mrs. Bryan.

The girls went over the farmhouse, the boys' headquarters, and found it more up-to-date in some respects than their own ancient mansion, but, as Louise said, nothing like so select. There was a bathtub here, also. Just one.

"We'll bicycle over to the river after hours, and use our old pool we made last year," explained Tom.

But that didn't seem to the girls a solution that would do for them. Not many of them had bicycles, for one thing.

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"We'll try to think it out, in the car going home," said Winona.

After they had seen the dairyhouse, where Mrs. Bryan added to her list of expenses a churn, a separator, and milk-cans, and Mr. Gedney spoke of buying cows as if it were quite a matter of course, they followed a deep, sparkling little brook along to the orchards.

"If these trees are properly pruned they'll bear well," said Mr. Gedney, "and the boys will have to start in immediately. Fortunately, it's a backward spring—as it is, we have none too much time."

They looked at the leafless trees with respect. There were rows on rows of them, peach and pear trees.

"There's an apple orchard further down," Mr. Gedney, who had been over the whole farm before, told them. "Fairly good apples, but they need attention, too. The place was a good one once, but it's been badly neglected."

"Why has it been neglected?" Winona demanded. "Goodness knows we've been paying enough for farm things. Apples were five cents apiece this winter, and mother says she hasn't the courage to look a pear in the face."

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"Middlemen," said Mr. Gedney succinctly. "Haven't you read how they dump carloads of fruit and vegetables into the rivers or use them for fertilizer, rather than let the price drop? There are other things called food trusts."

"Yes, I have," said Winona, "and I think they're just as wicked as the Germans. I don't see any difference between doing Belgian atrocities to a baby and letting it starve to death because its parents can't afford to buy it things to eat."

"There's no use thinking about such things unless we can do something about it," said Mrs. Bryan. "Our Housewives' League is doing all it can, which isn't much. And you girls can help by putting up and storing all the things this farm grows."

"We will!" said Louise and Helen and Winona, all in a breath, and then looked a little ashamed of themselves for being so enthusiastic.

"If all the girls and boys grow up feeling that way about it," said Mr. Gedney, "there won't be any troubles in the next generation, such as there have been in this."

"Let's go look at the apple orchard," said Winona, by way of changing the subject.

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So they went on down through the peach orchard, and across a little lane, to the apple trees.

"If these bear at all well there should be enough apples to pay for preserving and making jelly both," remarked Mrs. Bryan. "I wish we had brought Adelaide. She knows more about such things than any of us."

"But where are the fields?" Winona wanted to know.

"Off in the other direction," Mr. Gedney said. "They aren't anything worth looking at. Just brown earth."

Nevertheless the girls wanted to see the fields, and so they went up to them.

"It looks like a lot to do," remarked Helen, looking out over the brown stretch of ground, that fell away for acres and acres.

"If we can hire a tractor, or borrow one," explained Mr. Gedney, "there's not a bit more than we can manage. Indeed, many a farm as large has been run with many fewer hands than we shall have. Of course, the boys can't be expected to do as much work as if they were grown men."

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"I don't know about that," said Tom.

Louise was very silent while they went around the farm, or as much of it as they needed to.

"What's the matter, Louise?" Winona asked her curiously, for a silent Louise was something that didn't occur very often.

"I'm thinking," said Louise with dignity, "and I do it better when I'm not interrupted."

"All right," said the other girls, and let her think. They also had problems. Helen was wondering how to buy the mahogany furniture without taking any money that the Camp Fire needed for farming, and Winona's mind, less industriously, was wandering around the sunken place in the bricks, down the cellar. She could not get it out of her mind that it was a secret passage, and she wanted to go down it. Only it's impossible to climb through a solid brick wall, and she did not know how to dig the bricks away.

"Seems to me I read something in a detective story about somebody taking bricks out of a wall," she mused. "I wonder if I can find it when I get home."

She did not say anything to Helen, because she had laughed at her for the suggestion. But the more

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she thought of it the more sensible it seemed. The house was old enough for anything, certainly.

"I've solved it!" Louise announced triumphantly, as they got into the waiting motor and started back for their homes.

"Solved what?" demanded everybody.

"Baths!" said Louise.

CHAPTER THREE

ORDERING CHICKENS WITH TOM

EVERYBODY had forgotten what Louise could possibly mean, and looked at her in surprise.

"Don't you remember?" she explained. "There was only one bathtub for twenty people in the big house. I've solved the problem."

"Quick, Watson, the needle!" said Tom encouragingly. "And how, my dear Sherlock, have you solved the problem?"

"Do you really want to hear?" asked Louise a little doubtfully. "You have so much else to think about."

The boys had been talking agriculture violently, and telling each other that they must remember this and remember that, so Louise was a little afraid she was interrupting.

"This shyness isn't like you," said Tom teasingly. "Let's hear. We may want to make one, too."

"One—I'm going to have five or six!" said Louise enthusiastically. "Did you see the brook?"

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"Strange to relate, we did," said Tom. "As we had to cross it four times, we found ourselves forced to notice it."

Louise went on, undaunted by his teasing.

"That brook runs within a very little distance of the back of the house," she explained. "And below us there are no places where cows could drink, or anything else that would care whether it had soap in it or not. So my plan is, to take some of our last year's tents, and put planks across, and fasten them securely, so they won't slip. Then put the tents on the planks, so we can step into the brook under them."

"Under the planks?" asked Tom.

"Under the tents, silly! And two of us that I know of have portable canvas bathtubs. We can swing those over the brook. And there's a hose, a good one, for I saw it, that we can connect with the hot water faucet in the kitchen. And there's our luxurious private bath."

"Fine!" said Tom. "Little details like getting the hot water too hot and the cold water into the canvas bathtubs can be settled later, I suppose."

"Yes, they can, and I'm going to," Louise told

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him. "I've always put through things like that before, that I wanted to, and I don't see why I shouldn't now."

"The only thing against it is," said Billy, speaking in his slower voice that people always listened to, "that you are all going to have a lot of hard work to do. You may be too tired for extras."

"Then I'll come down and get it done before the actual farming begins," explained Louise.

That removed the last objection, and they let her alone after that, to figure on the backs of all the envelopes she could collect from the party.

It seemed queer to go back to school next day, exactly as if there was no wonderful and romantic old manor-house, and no hundred and fifty acre farm waiting for them to grow war food on. Arithmetic and history seemed stale, and Louise and Winona and Helen slid through their studies with less attention than they had given them since the term began. Indeed, when the history teacher asked Winona for the name of the English king who did most for learning in the early days of England, she answered dreamily, "Alfalfa the Great!" and never knew what she had said till she heard the scream of laughter that went up around her.

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Mr. Gedney, being a man of initiative, was wise enough to put the arithmetic and geometry problems that it fell to his lot to teach into terms of acreage and seeding, and the Scouts, who formed the majority of the boys at school, sat up alertly, and got through their lessons extra well. But altogether the farm took up so much of the boys' and girls' minds that the scoutmasters and guardians began to wonder what to do about it.

It wore off a little by Saturday. The boys were already consulting planting-tables, and had gone off in a body to buy fertilizer, and were consulting about live stock. They told the girls that they could take charge of the chickens, and hinted that a vegetable garden could be run by Camp Fire girls rather better than by hardworking Scouts.

The girls agreed gladly, for, as Winona said, they wanted to feel that they, too, were actually growing things, and it wouldn't be much fun to merely put up the things the boys grew.

"There's no use buying chickens, now," said Winona at an informal meeting on the school steps. "But I wonder if we oughtn't to engage them?"

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"Of course, we ought," said Louise. "Make sure they haven't any other dates. You talk as if we were going to rent our chickens."

"It would be a good thing if we could," said Adelaide Hughes unexpectedly. "Then we could just give them back at the end of the season."

"They'll be just as good to eat at the end of the season as they are when we buy them," Winona reminded them.

Louise laughed.

"Not quite. They'll be that much older and tougher, and wearier of laying."

"Somebody had better hunt up chicken prices and dates," Helen reminded them practically.

"You can," said Louise.

"There ought to be a committee," Helen rebelled.

"All right, you and Adelaide be the committee," said everybody in unison.

"We'll have to find out about the prices of chicken-wire, and chickens, and how many, and what kind and how much," said Helen.

She looked rather mournful as she said it—Helen had an artistic soul, and it was rather above chickens.

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"I *did* want to be given charge of the flower garden," she confessed.

The other girls responded almost in unison.

"You shall be!"

"And the chickens, too?" she demanded. "And when, may I ask, will I find time to do my share of the other camp work, and mend up my old furniture, and model?"

"You won't find any time at all to model," Louise told her cheerfully.

The girls were walking home by this time, and had decided to go and finish their discussion, which threatened to be a long one, in Winona's house before the grate fire.

Helen looked thoughtful at this.

"No, I don't suppose I really ought to take the time for that," she admitted.

"There'll be rainy days when there'll be lots of time for such things," Winona offered consolingly.

"There doesn't seem to be much else now, anyway," laughed Marie Hunter. "The Blue Birds keep me busy all the time keeping them out of mischief. I have a meeting with them at five this afternoon—at

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your house, by the way, Winnie, so I won't lose any time."

Winona looked brightly up at tall, grave Marie.

"I think you take those Blue Birds too hard," she said. "You and Edith."

"They're hard Blue Birds!" replied Marie whimsically.

"They spend their life doing everything they shouldn't, I know," Louise sympathized. Her own younger sister was something of a case, so she knew what she was talking about.

They had reached the house by this time, and trooped in, taking off their rubbers and stacking their umbrellas, and making a bee-line for the sitting room, where Mrs. Merriam rarely was at this time of day.

They dropped down on the floor, around the bright fire, and went on discussing.

"Does anybody know about chickens, to begin with?" demanded Helen.

"There's something called Rhode Island Reds that I seem to have heard of," said Louise helpfully. "And Wyandottes."

"There must be chicken books and government

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documents," said Adelaide, who was also on the chicken committee.

"And Mr. Gedney must remember something about them," Helen added.

Winona dashed to the telephone at this, and called him up on the spot.

The girls waited in a breathless circle, while she asked questions and received answers. She came back to them and passed on her knowledge.

"He says Rhode Island Reds are a good general purpose breed, and so are Wyandottes. There are some kinds that are better for eggs and some for meat, and we ought to decide which we are going in for."

"I think we ought to stick to general purpose chickens," said Louise, who plainly didn't want to abandon her beloved Rhode Island Reds.

"H'm," meditated Helen, who was now quite reconciled, apparently, to being chicken mistress. "We'll want to have eggs, and we'll want to sell chickens, too. I guess you're right, Lou."

"There's a way of keeping eggs in something called water-glass," contributed Adelaide unexpectedly. "I remember one of the farmhouses we used to buy of last year did that."

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"It's a lovely name," said Marie dreamily. "I wonder what it looks like?"

"You get it at the drug-store," said Adelaide, who really seemed to have a lot of information.

"Well, you and Helen had better get the addresses of people who sell chickens, and go around and look at them all," advised Marie.

"Very well," said Helen and Adelaide.

"But while we are doing that somebody else ought to go out to the farm and pick out a place for the chickens to live," added Helen. "And find out about the wire—how much we'll need."

"It ought to be on the brook, so they can get a drink without bothering us every time," added Winona.

"I've heard of chicken-troughs," contributed Adelaide again, her thin face lighting up with interest.

"Good heavens, you certainly do know a lot," said Louise with respect. "Very well, folks. Now, I'll go out, with anyone else you select, or the Camp Fire selects, on Saturday next, and pick out a home for the chickens. Meanwhile, Adelaide and Helen will be choosing the chickens we are giving a home to. That all right?"

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"Fine!" said everybody, with the lightness of heart which only those who have never gone into chicken-raising can know.

"And we must buy a chicken-book," added Marie.

"That's the first money we are spending out of our thousand dollars," added Winona. "I do hope it will be enough!"

"A thousand dollars is *lots* of money!" said Adelaide.

"Not as much as it used to be," said Louise mournfully.

"Well, it ought to be enough to go around," added Winona. "Now, who's going to go out with Lou to find a place on the farm for the chickens?"

"It had better be one of the boys, or Mr. Gedney," suggested Marie. "We don't want to take some place that they need to plant things. I don't suppose the soil matters."

This hadn't struck the others, but they saw Marie was right, and Louise said she would try to secure Tom or Billy Lee, or Lonny, Adelaide's brother. The girls were pretty sure it would be Tom who would go with her, because Tom and Louise were very good friends,

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and each was in the way of doing a good deal for the other.

Accordingly, next day Tom and Louise went chicken-hunting.

"It sounds like a very exciting sport," said Louise, as she started forth, smoothing down the rings of red hair that would fly about her face.

"I don't see why," said Tom matter-of-factly. "All you have to do is to buy your chickens; order them, rather; and have them taken over to the place you are arranging for them when the time comes."

"It sounds very simple the way you put it," said Louise.

They were taking the trolley as far in the chicken-fancier's direction as it would carry them. Beyond that there would be a short walk.

"Oh, it's shivery!" said Louise, drawing her coat closer around her. "I pity the poor chickens if they have to stay outdoors this weather."

"They don't," Tom informed her. "There's always a place where they can go when it rains."

"I believe," Louise went on solemnly, "that the war makes all this cold, nasty weather. Don't you know

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how the men make rain out west—shoot cannons up in the air till the rain comes down?"

Tom shook his head.

"The war can do almost anything nasty," he said, "but I don't believe it could go that far."

"I'm sure of it," said she. "Now how many chickens did Mr. Gedney say we ought to have?"

"About two hundred."

"Good gracious!" said Louise, even her adventurous nature was appalled by the necessity for so many chickens. "We could *never* take care of all those!"

"No more trouble than a few," Tom told her. "More expense to feed—but then you have more eggs, and more broilers."

"Broilers! I never thought of that!" said Louise. "I suppose you boys would kill them for us before we sold them."

"Sure we would. But it wouldn't be good for you," answered Tom teasingly. "We'll give you lessons in chicken-killing, and then you can go on and do it yourselves—very simple thing to do!"

Louise made up her mind privately that *she* wouldn't be the one to execute the broilers, no matter who did it.

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"There's the place," said Tom at this point, showing her the farm where the chicken-man lived.

"Yes, and there's another thing I'd completely forgotten; chicken-wire. We'd have to get that."

"I should think you would," Tom assented.

"More money gone!" said Louise.

"Why, Louise, you're a regular miser!" protested Tom. "You have to spend money for stock. We're going mighty easy, I can tell you—and we're in particular luck, because Mr. Gedney knows a man who is going to loan us his plows and harrows. We may even get a tractor. All we'll have to buy is seed and fertilizer and stock."

"It sounds like a lot to me," said Louise, "but then, of course, I've never handled much money at a time."

"Neither have I," said Tom. "But it comes perfectly natural."

Louise laughed.

"It does to most men and boys, I guess," she said.

The chicken-fancier had been telephoned to that they were coming out, and was ready for them. Louise and Tom looked at chickens and hens and pullets and roosters and cockerels till both of them felt as if the

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world was one huge chicken-yard. But they found one thing very helpful to them; the chicken-man knew what they were trying to do, and obviously wanted to help them as much as he could.

"You might as well take Rhode Island Reds," he told them when Louise expressed her preference for them. "And all one kind of chickens are better and easier to manage. And I'll make you a special price. It's a good cause. Any time you get into trouble with them come over here to me and I'll tell you anything you want to know free."

Things were certainly going well! Louise thanked him fervently. The end of it was that they decided to contract for two hundred chickens, to be delivered when they went out to the farm.

"Now we can get tea at a roadhouse—might as well make a party of it—and go home," suggested Tom when the business was over.

Louise shook her head determinedly.

"Not a bit of it! We have a half afternoon on our hands, and time may be scarce later. Us for the hardware merchant, and chicken-wire."

"The best way to do," suggested the chicken-man

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blandly, "is to fence in two acres with wire, and give the fowls free run. They do much better that way."

"Two acres!" gasped Louise. "Chicken-wire for all that!"

"Come on, Lou, be a sport," urged Tom. "Two acres isn't the end of the moral law. Lots of folks have done it."

"You're brave," said Louise, but she did as he said.

"You would do well to engage your incubator and breeder now, too," said the chicken-man.

"Lead on, Macduff!" said Louise. "And if all our thousand dollars goes for chickens, all the worse for the Scouts, that's all!"

"It won't," said Tom. He took her masterfully over to the hardware store, and they were nearly inside, when Louise balked.

"Look here, Tom Merriam! We neither of us have 'de sense we was bawn wid.' My own father has a hardware department in his store, and if he won't give us chicken-wire and posts, and even order an incubator and a brooder for us at cost price, I'd like to know what's the point of my having a father!"

"Right you are!" said Tom. "So come on and have tea anyhow."

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They passed a roadhouse a little while after he spoke, and they got off the trolley, quite careless of the difficulty they might have in getting one again.

"I love having tea at hotels and places like that," said Louise, eating the crumpets with satisfaction. "It feels so grown-up. I don't like tea one bit, but when you have it here, with lemon and lump sugar and a waiter, it's awfully nice."

"I don't like waiters in *my* tea; I'd rather have flies," said Tom, and they both laughed.

"Well, have a fly!" offered Louise promptly, catching a mournful survivor who was crawling slowly down the wall, and pretending to hold it over Tom's teacup.

"I take it back," said Tom, "I'd rather have a waiter."

"Yes, sir!" said an alert specimen, catching his last words and springing forward.

They both got to laughing so after that that they nearly disgraced themselves, and the fact that they had to stand at the side of the road afterwards for a half hour, waiting for another trolley, did not suffice to stop them. It was one of those days when every-

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thing makes you laugh; and they were still giggling when the trolley came leisurely around a bend and took them back home.

"I think we can get into the store before it closes—come on!" said Louise, jumping out of the trolley, as fresh as if she had just come from home.

Tom followed her more slowly, and they gained the top floor, where the hardware department was, with a half-hour to spare before closing time.

The clerks in the store all knew Louise very well, and they showed her chicken-wire and told her they could order fence-posts and nails, and even said that an incubator and brooder could be ordered through the store. It was near enough to the farming district to make such things necessarily kept in stock, or at least get-atable.

Louise took notes of the prices, and tackled her father that night at the supper table. He, like everyone else they had met so far, was inclined to do everything he could for the farming project. He promised to get everything she wanted at cost price, and have them taken out to the farm as soon as they came. All that remained to do now was to get the formal ap-

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proval of the Camp Fire in full session; but as Winona, Louise, Helen, Adelaide, and Marie were practically the leaders, only Helen and Adelaide not being Torch-bearers, this was scarcely more than a courtesy.

Another meeting was called, but this time the girls voted to give the committees full power to go ahead; so Louise did. She was told she could spend what she found necessary on chickens, given the approval of the guardian.

"I want to ask a favor of the Camp Fire," she said, when she had been told that she was mistress of the chicken situation. "When the wire comes, and the incubator and brooder, whatever they may be, I want the Camp Fire to take an afternoon off, go out to camp with me—I mean to the farm—and all pitch in and put up the chicken-wire."

Winona laughed.

"Oh, Louise!" she said. "And *I* wanted the Camp Fire to take that afternoon off, and come out to the house, and clean it!"

"Why can't we do both?" suggested Dorothy Gray's quiet voice.

Dorothy was not a leader, but she was one of those

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comfortable girls who can always be depended upon to carry things through, once they were planned for her.

"We can go out and plant the chicken-wire next Saturday afternoon, if it's fine, and if it's rainy we can clean up the house. Then the next Saturday we'll do whatever we didn't do *that* Saturday."

She was getting rather mixed, in her earnestness, but the girls knew exactly what she meant, and they agreed with her.

"I have a better plan," offered Winona.

"Let's have the biggest, strongest girls go and put up chicken-wire, and the others tackle the house. In that way we'll get both done at once—and I don't think it'll take more than six girls to each job."

"Wind and weather permitting," Mrs. Bryan reminded them, and "wind and weather permitting," echoed the girls, for there had been a good deal of wind, and certainly a variety of the worst kind of weather, for some time past.

So that was agreed to, and everybody had a comfortable feeling that there was nothing else to bother about, till another quiet voice upraised itself.

"I'm chairman of the vegetable committee," stated

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Marie Hunter, "and I want to say that the boys intend to start their plowing right away. There are some vegetables that we ought to plant from seed and under a coldframe now, or almost now—we've been looking up the tables."

"Coldframe?" said everybody.

"There are skylights we think we can get," said Marie, so positively that nobody asked further details. "Anyway, we have to start our vegetable garden as soon as we can, so *we* have to go buy seeds, and talk to the boys about the ground."

"Good gracious, we're in the middle of it already!" said Louise delightedly. "I begin to feel like a real farmerette. All right, then—meet us at the haunted manor at three next Saturday!"

"*We* are going out in the morning," stated Adelaide Hughes for the cleaning committee.

"All right, then, so are we and the chicken-wire," said Louise. "Nobody's going to get ahead of little Louise, the chicken chaperone!"

CHAPTER FOUR

TIDYING UP THE FARM

ACCORDINGLY, on Saturday there was a grand sortie of girls to the farm or that part of it occupied by the old manor. They assembled on a street corner, the cleaning committee and the vegetable committee, and waited with mops and pails, and what patience they could, for the automobile that was to bring Louise, with her chicken-wire and posts, and Marie, with her skylights for coldframes.

Presently along came the automobile. Louise was driving, and they could see Marie's dark head on the back seat, just visible over what looked like a choice collection of old door-frames.

"But where's the wire?" demanded Adelaide, who had a lively interest in it, as she was to help put it up.

"They couldn't have it under their feet, could they?" queried little yellow-haired Edith Hillis doubtfully, holding on her hat, for there was a raw wind blowing.

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"I don't think so," said Winona, also doubtfully. "They have two acres to fence in, and I'm sure that would make rather a big roll."

Winona was not strong on arithmetic.

"How big is an acre?" demanded Adelaide. "I don't believe any of us know what we're planning to do."

"I don't know," said Winona, "that is, I can't exactly see the size in my head. But I think it's two hundred feet one way and two hundred and twenty the other."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Helen. "It can't be, because that's smaller than the size of the lot our house is on, and that's nothing like an acre."

"Well, I don't know, then!" said Winona. "I guess it *was* a building lot I had in my mind."

"The trouble is, we're all too far past that in arithmetic to know," said Dorothy Gray, when the shout of laughter that Winona's frank confession roused had died down. "Here, let's find one of the little girls, and she'll know."

"Oh, not Florence!" said Florence's sister. "She'd want to go, and she'd expect Puppums to go too, and

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there isn't room in that car for more than half of us, even making two trips."

"What's the trouble?" called Louise, bringing the motor to a spectacular stop.

"Where's your wire?" they called back.

"There ain't goin' to be no wire," quoted Louise coolly.

The girls exclaimed, as they began to pile into the machine.

"No wire?"

"What's the matter, was the store out of it?"

"Aren't chickens wearing wire any more?"

Louise did no attempt to answer till all the girls that could get in were in, and the overflow had taken seats in a small cart that had been lashed firmly, if unpicturesquely, behind.

"The matter was that if we buy wire enough to wire in two acres we'll go broke almost on the spot. My sweet children, do you know how much two acres are?"

Everybody laughed again.

"Not one of us," answered Winona. "We've every last one of us forgotten."

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"Two acres cover 9680 square yards of ground," answered Louise triumphantly, "and you can count up how much money *that* would mean, with chicken-wire gone up to seven cents a foot."

Marie promptly pulled her fountain pen out of the pocket of her middy and figured hastily on a package of seeds.

"My gracious!" she said. "That makes more than \$75 without the staples and posts. What are you going to do about it, Louise?"

"Do without!" said Louise. "It suddenly came to me, as I was weeping in the ruins of my hopes, that the people next door to you had chickens, Winnie, chickens that didn't have any wire at home at all. If they'd been wired in they wouldn't have bounded over your fence, and Clay wouldn't have killed the oldest and toughest, last fall, for that clergyman's dinner we had to get up in such a hurry."

Winona giggled reminiscently.

"That was Henry," she said. "He was a family pet, and we had to pay pretty nearly all it had cost to send him to prep school and college, Tom said, when the Janeways found it out. You're right, Louise."

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"But how do you keep them home?" Edith wanted to know. "Butter their claws?"

"Ooh, what an idea!" shivered Louise. "I don't like the way their claws feel, anyway. All sort of clammy. No. Don't you know the proverb, 'chickens come home to roost'? I suppose if we have a nice roost for them they'll like us, and stay there. And then we have to feed them, too, and that attaches them. If a chicken gets lonesome for a walk, by the time he's walked two acres he'll be tired, or I should think so."

"Then what are you going to do when you get out there?" asked Helen, "and what are we all going to do, after coming out prepared to stick in fence-posts all the afternoon?"

"You can all help clean house!" said Winona enthusiastically. "With twenty rooms to sweep and clean, and chimneys to investigate, there'll be work for everybody. I'd been worrying a little about whether one afternoon would see it through. There's the cellar—that would take about a half-afternoon by itself."

"Winona, you're a human vampire!" said Louise.

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"And anyway, the incubators and the brooders and things are coming out this afternoon, and they have to be set up."

"Incubators and brooders! You talk as if you bought them by the dozen!" mocked Helen. "Aren't they going to be very expensive?"

"I don't know," said Louise placidly. "I told father I'd leave it to him—that he was to pick out as good and cheap ones as we could get, and as many."

"All we can do is to wait and see," said Helen.

"Can't we stop at all the houses where the girls' people are, and get brooms?" Winona wanted to know. "The more brooms we get the quicker the sweeping will be done."

"You are certainly a persistent person," sighed Louise, who was in such a hurry to get out and see her brooders that she could scarcely wait. But she did as Winona asked, and a collection was eventually made amounting to eight brooms, six dustpans, and several old sheets for dusters and rags.

She stopped at the door of the old house, at length, and waved her hand impatiently to Winona.

"Hop out, Winnie, you and your band of scrub-



THE MORE BROOMS WE GET, THE QUICKER THE SWEEPING WILL
BE DONE



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women. Come on, chicken committee—we want to see the brooders.”

But the band of scrubwomen declined to hop out.

“I’m going to see those brooders all standing up, row after row, before I touch a floor,” said Helen resolutely, and the rest of the girls who were going to clean the house backed her up. The end of it was that they flung the brooms and dustpans out on the broad old porch, tied the cloths around the last dustpan and flung that, too, and went with one accord to the spot (no one had seen it) where Louise had told her father to leave the brooders.

“It was to be one side of the old barn, rather far back,” said Louise, piloting the machine around the old, overgrown carriage-road, to the big barn and carriage-house that stood side by side. “Here we are—why, good gracious—*that* isn’t a brooder!”

“It’s a big one if it is!” said Helen.

Before their eyes, after they had put the machine in the carriage-house and emerged from the barn, stood a respectably sized building, too low for another barn, and a little too small. It had unmistakably been there as long as the other outhouses, at least. Out from its

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front ran an enclosure of bedraggled and ancient chicken-wire.

"Your father never sent *that!*" said two or three of the girls in a convinced chorus, while Louise looked at it, in intense surprise.

"A chicken-house—good gracious, I forgot all about our needing a chicken-house!" said Louise. "I suppose they've set the other things inside. Come on, girls—this is luck!"

They tiptoed after her over the rubbish and mown grass that filled the enclosure, and up to the door of the rickety building. No brooders or incubators met their eye. Instead there was a barrel with its head stove in, and a half-dozen large, flat brushes. Beside it stood eight long pieces of wood, and several hammers and a box of nails. On the top of it, weighted down by one of the hammers, lay a folded piece of wrapping paper, which Louise opened. It was a note from her father.

"Dear Daughter," it said, "with this you will find a barrel of whitewash, which I hope will be enough for the farm's needs all summer, six brushes for apply-

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ing the same, wood for roosts, and hammer and nails to put the roosts up with. The watchword of the war is economy, and if you whitewash the inside of this excellent henhouse and scrub its cement floor, after putting up your roosts, you will have everything you need for amateur chicken-raising. Make your hens do the work for you, instead of pampering them with machinery. It's a present so far.

"With best wishes, and the hope that your family may be allowed to buy eggs from you at a decent profit, I remain,

"Your affectionate father."

"Well, good *gracious!*" said Louise, and said no more.

"Do you think we can raise the chickens without an incubator?" asked Dorothy Gray.

"Father seems to think so," said Louise quite thoughtfully.

"We'll save a lot of money that way," said Adelaide prudently. "And after all, it isn't as if we were going into the poultry business on a large scale. Come on, Lou, let's do the whitewashing. I always wanted to."

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"It's all dry," said Louise, looking into the barrel.

"I know," said Helen. "We have to mix it with water, and stir it till it stops bubbling up. We can get one of the old wash-tubs out of the cellar, and a stick."

Helen and Dorothy ran off and came back with the tub and stick, and Helen mixed the whitewash quite expertly, while Dorothy, who had found three scrubbing-brushes tucked by a provident mother inside a dustpan, fastened a piece of sacking around her, and began valiantly at a corner of the cement floor. Louise and Elizabeth Greene, and Gladys Williams, who were two of the other girls on the chicken committee, did likewise in other corners.

"Is there anything we can do?" asked the rest in a chorus.

"You might go into the house and see if you can find any more scrubbing brushes," suggested Louise, lifting her head like a turtle from where she was scrubbing on all fours.

"All right," said Winona, turning, and racing for the house. The rest followed her, even dignified Marie, all trying to see who could reach the back door first.

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An exhaustive hunt through the cellars and the enormous kitchen unearthed two more brushes and an old mop and pail, all rather the worse for wear, but still usable. They carried these out to the girls who were working in the barn, together with more cakes of soap, and returned to their own concerns. It did not look as if it was going to be done in one day, but they were not discouraged, for they had started so early as to allow plenty of time to get ready for everything.

The manor had looked dusty and untidy, but nothing much worse, when they had been over it before. But to the eyes of Winona, and the other girls who had undertaken to clean it, it looked now as if it had never been cleaned in its life.

"If thirty maids with thirty mops
Swept it for half a year,
Then do you think," the Walrus said,
"That they could get it clear?"

quoted Winona, standing in the middle of the big living-room with a broom.

"I doubt it," said the Carpenter,
And wept a bitter tear.

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Helen capped her from the corner where she was shaking herself free of lime-dust and getting into her apron. She had started to scrub the henhouse floor, as being more immediately exciting, and followed the girls she had been assigned to rather belatedly.

"Well, we can only keep at it," said Winona. "Helen, what's to be done with this furniture you think can have such grand things done with it?"

"Well, I don't know whether they'd let us have it—it may be just stored here," said Helen.

Winona swept on as she talked.

"Let's carry it to the little out-kitchen for now," she said. "When we go home to-night why don't you call up Mr. Gedney, and have him ask the people about it?"

"All right, I will," said Helen, taking one arm of a big armchair while Anna Morris took the other, and starting to carry it away.

They carried out all the furniture and put it in the out-kitchen, and went on with their cleaning vigorously, finishing the sweeping of the whole house by noon. By this time the henhouse committee had done everything, even to putting up the roosts. This last

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was simple, because they found that there were niches in the beams along the side of the wall to fasten the roosts into, and that they had been carefully measured to fit by whoever Mr. Lane had sent out.

The girls built a fire in one of the two enormous old fireplaces of the great downstairs room, swung hot water over it in camp fashion, and made themselves hot cocoa to drink with the sandwiches they had brought out.

"We are certainly going to have a chance for awfully good times if we have any time to have them," said Louise, eating her third sandwich and drinking her second cup of cocoa. "Do you suppose we'll get any time off?"

"I should think so," said Marie. "There will surely be days when there's nothing to do but the cooking and housework. And there'll be Sundays—though you can't play games or anything like that on Sunday, of course. And we may be too tired to go tramping."

"Well, we'll see," said all of them.

"How are you getting on with your coldframe, Marie?" somebody thought to ask.

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"Splendidly!" she answered. "I had the boards sawed before I came out, and brought them along with the sashes. It's nearly done."

"And we ordered some fertilizer, the right kind, and it's coming out at two, just about the time we'll be ready for it," added Edith. "After that we shall lay out the garden."

Suddenly Marie, who had been seeming quite pleased and contented with the progress she had made, uttered a little squeal.

"Oh, my *goodness!*" she exclaimed.

"What's the matter, Marie?" asked Louise. "Did something bite you? I thought I saw a spider, when I came in."

"No, nothing like that," said Marn, dislaimfully. "It was just a thought. It's going to be very fine for your chickens to have free range, and a pleasant time without any chicken-wire—but what about my seeds? The chickens will dig them all up before they have a chance to get above ground."

The girls looked at each other aghast. Nobody had thought of that. It looked for a while as if either chickens or garden would have to be given up, and nobody wanted to do either.

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Finally Winona had an inspiration.

"Why not chicken-wire the vegetables?" she asked. "They don't take up so much room—it shouldn't cost so very much. Instead of keeping the chickens *in*, keep them *out*."

"Good for you, Winnie!" cried Louise. "That's a brilliant idea—we'll do it."

"It looks as if we were going to have to be out here most of next week, anyway," went on Winona. "So we can put it up then."

"All next week?" queried Helen. "Then I can go on with my furniture—if I'm allowed," she added.

"And now for the cellar!" said Winona. "That is, if everybody has rested enough. I'm afraid that cellar is going to be tough."

It was tough. It extended under the whole house, and it was divided into rooms almost as if it were a story by itself. It was damp and dark and very dirty, and if it had not been for a fortunate inspiration of Helen's, the building of a wood fire in a Dutch oven that was set in the laundry wall, the girls would have been badly chilled. As it was, by means of frequent

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excursions to it for warmth, and by keeping it vigorously up all the afternoon, so as to dry the cellar as much as they could, no colds were caught. At five o'clock they had scrubbed half the cellar, and it was too dark to think of anything but going home.

Just as they had decided to call a halt Winona's eye was caught again by the sunken square of bricks high up in the wall, that Helen had hoped was a secret passage. She was standing up, leaning against the wall, waiting for Helen, who wanted to finish a dusty corner before she stopped, and Louise, who had finished too, was beside her.

"I suppose we'll always wonder whether this really *is* a passage or not, till we know," she said idly, and began to scratch at the bricks with her hatpin, to clear away the whitewash.

"And I suppose we'll never do anything about it till the end of the chapter," rejoined Louise.

"Well, if we don't we'll always be able to think maybe there was one," said Winona, laughing a little, "and if we did take away the bricks we'd find out it was a gas-meter or something, and not have anything to think about."

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She went on scratching as she talked.

"You'll ruin the point of that hatpin," said Louise.

"No, I won't. Anyway, it wasn't much good. I spoiled it toasting marshmallows. I—oh!"

"Why—what?" demanded Louise.

"Look!" said Winona breathlessly.

The hatpin had sunk up to the head between two of the bricks.

"There isn't any mortar around that brick," said Winona excitedly. "Oh, Lou, if it *should* be!"

Louise pulled out her own penknife, and they both carefully worked around the brick that seemed to have no mortar. And in a moment they had loosened it altogether.

"Be careful!" warned Louise. "Here, you put your hatpin in above, and I'll put the knife-blade in below——"

They did it, and pulled cautiously. The brick came slowly out, and Winona caught it.

Louise pulled out her little pocket searchlight, and flashed it inside.

"Let me see!" breathed Winona.

She peered in, and Louise looked, too.

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"It *is* something! There is a place behind it!" Winona whispered.

"Here come the other girls. Quick—don't let's tell them till we're sure ourselves!" hissed Louise. They thrust the brick back and hurried upstairs with the others.

"Let's not tell anybody till we've had a chance to investigate it ourselves," Winona murmured to Louise. "The first chance we get we'll take out the rest of those bricks and hunt."

"All right," said Louise. "I don't want to tell."

"There may be only some old room they don't use any more because it leaks, or a closet. It mayn't be anything," said Winona.

"Nonsense. It's something exciting and romantic, and we're going to find out what."

"What are you whispering about?" demanded Adelaide, and they had to stop.

"The best way of taking inkstains out of chicken feathers," Louise answered her solemnly.

Then they began talking about whether it was better to leave the fires, or put them out. They put them out, finally, after a final getting warm, trooped out to the motor and went home.

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It was a good day's work; the coldframe built, the soil prepared for seeds in it, the lines of the vegetable garden drawn, the henhouse cleaned and ready, and last, but not least, the cellar half cleaned and a secret passage possibly discovered.

"Oh, but I'm tired!" said everybody.

"I'm so glad to-morrow's Sunday!" said Winona, voicing the feelings of everyone. "I'm going to sleep till the very last minute before church-time, and maybe all the rest of the day."

But after she had reached home and had a hot bath and put on a fresh dress she didn't feel like that at all.

"Oh, we've done such lots of work!" she told her family at the supper table. She almost told about the secret passage, but not quite. She made up her mind, however, that she would ask Louise if she minded letting Tom and Billy into the secret. She thought she would rather crawl into a place like that with the boys along than without them, and she was perfectly certain that Louise was going to insist on going in at the very first opportunity they could find.

We've done a little something, too," said

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Tom, who had come in and had his hot bath before she had.

"Do you mean that you were over at the farm? We were at the house all day, and we never saw you," said his sister.

"No," said Tom leisurely, "we weren't at the farm exactly. We were off picking out stock, with the help of Mr. Gedney and of a friend of his who's a cattle-fancier. Had any of you remembered that there have to be cows and a couple of horses, and there ought to be pigs, too?"

"Why, this farm is going on forever!" said Winona. "I begin to be frightened. It's an awfully big thing we're undertaking."

"Not too big to put through," said Tom calmly. "There are plenty of us to work, and Mr. Gedney knows a lot about farming. We looked at cows to-day, out at a farm, and pigs. I don't know where on earth we are going to get the money for cows and horses, too. We ought to have a small dairy, anyhow, and we simply cannot run that farm without at least two horses."

"What about the plowing?" asked his father interestedly. "I should think that was your chief problem."

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"Oh, we're all right there," said Tom. "Mr. Gedney says he is almost sure we can borrow a tractor for all the work we want done. We may get it from the state. You see, we really are doing something useful, and everyone seems willing to help."

"Long may you wave!" said his father.

"Yes, but I want to do something!" clamored little Florence.

"There'll be plenty to do," Winona warned her. "Indeed, if you could look after the cows, once they get them, it would be a help. I don't see how we are going to be able to spare girls for dairy work."

"Make the Blue Birds take care of the chickens," suggested Tom brilliantly. "Very appropriate. And your chicken girls can switch to the dairy."

"That looks like the only way," said Winona.

"But, oh, Winona," said her brother fervently, "if you Camp Fire Girls or we Scouts don't think of some way of getting a pair of farm horses without paying for them, our farm is up a very tall tree!"

CHAPTER FIVE

MISS BARRISON'S HORSES

WINONA pursued the question of the horses.

"Why don't you give up cows?" she inquired.
"Or pigs?"

"Well, we can," said Tom gloomily. "It doesn't matter much which we give up. Only our money won't stretch over seed and fertilizer—we are getting those, of course—and machinery and stock. Something has to go."

He looked at her hopefully. Tom teased his sister occasionally, but in his heart he had a great opinion of her capabilities, or it may have been her luck, in getting things when they were needed.

Winona, who had finished her meal by this time, looked thoughtful. It *was* a problem.

"I'm going to think about it," she informed Tom.
"I believe you can get nearly anything you want in this world, if you know how."

"Oh, I know how," said Tom scornfully. "Simplest thing on earth. Blackjack a horse-dealer, and

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walk off with his horses. That's the only way to get them without paying for them or hiring them."

Winona sat up.

"Tommy, do you remember how I got my boat last summer, and homes for the cats, and the camp victrola? We advertised. I don't think there's any harm in advertising for a horse."

"Two," said Tom. "But why should anybody want to loan a horse to do farm work all summer?"

"You can't tell," said she. "Haven't you ever read advertisements for something and then right under it somebody advertising the other end of it, so to speak?"

"I don't read advertisements as hard as you do," he said. "But go ahead, anyhow, and glory go with you!"

"When do you want the horses?" said Winona with all the confidence of a fairy godmother.

"As soon as we can get them. Mr. Gedney is going to make arrangements to have two boys staying on the farm all the time now, right along, till it's time for the heavy work. We can find plenty for your steeds to do."

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"Mind, I don't *promise*," said Winona. "But I'm going to try."

Accordingly, that night, because the next day was Sunday and she wanted to get it done before that time, she took a pencil and a great many sheets of paper, and wrote and wrote till she had an advertisement that suited her. She made four copies of it for as many New York newspapers, and walked down to the drug-store and bought stamps, and mailed them out herself before she went to sleep.

"There!" she told Tom, coming back. "We ought to begin to get answers surely by Tuesday or Wednesday."

"You certainly have a hopeful disposition!" her brother told her. Nevertheless, he, too, looked as if he thought there was some chance of horses now.

The girls went steadily on with their cleaning through the next week. Winona watched the mail hungrily, and when Tuesday came—and no letters—she was almost in despair.

"If you'll only wait," she told Tom pathetically, "I'm sure there'll be some."

Tom waited—it was all he could do.

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"Don't feel too badly if you don't land any advertisement horses," he told her. "We have a plan of exchanging labor for the use of horses. All the farmers are going to be mighty short-handed this year, from what we can see."

"But that would be a shame—to be all hot and tired and have to go off and do more work!" said Winona.

Wednesday came—and no letters. Winona went off to school feeling that life held nothing for her. She came home in the afternoon almost certain that her advertisements had been wasted—to be greeted by her mother with:

"Winona, here's a big pile of mail for you! I think it must be in answer to your advertisement."

Winona pounced on it.

"Oh, why do you think it didn't come till now, and then all at once?" she asked.

"Probably your advertisements didn't get to the city in time to be put in on Monday," her mother told her. "Didn't you think of that?"

"Never!" said Winona, busily tearing open envelopes. "Ten answers! Surely we must get two horses out of that!"

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Tom came in while she was sitting there, opening letters.

"Winona!" he said. "You don't mean you actually got answers?"

"Yes, I do——" said Winona calmly. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, do you mind telling me," he asked, "before you go any further, just what you said to these deluded people to coax good horses out of them?"

"Not a bit," said Winona, looking up from her letters with her calm blue eyes. "It was very simple. I just said: 'Help your country! Scouts and Camp Fire Girls are running a big farm for the country. We need two horses. We will be kind to them. Reply Camp Karonya, care W. Merriam.' And I gave the town. Oh, and I said 'Best references.'"

Tom shouted with laughter. He sat down on the chair nearest her and took a fair half of her letters, still laughing.

"You certainly are a wonder, Winnie!" he declared. "We thought of asking to hire them, or work for them, but nobody but you would have thought of just calmly stating it as a patriotic duty, and putting it up to the public."

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"I don't see why," said Winona, still placidly, and opening another letter. "We're not the only people in America who want to do all they can for the country."

"This isn't any good," said Tom, tossing her a scrawled letter on ruled pad paper. "It's a darky down in Tennessee who will contribute his mule if we'll pay his fare and the mule's, and his wife's and two pick-aninnies' up and back. Says he'd die for his country, but he and the mule can't be separated."

"They shan't be," said Winona with decision. "They shall stay in Tennessee together forever, as far as we're concerned."

They both giggled, and went on to the rest. Two others were on very much the same lines—men who were trying to get their fares and their families' paid from a long distance, and offered a horse as a bribe. A fourth looked more promising. They sorted the good from the bad finally, and Tom undertook to answer the useless ones, while Winona was to write the good ones, as having a more agreeable way of putting things.

"This is a lovely letter," said Winona, holding up

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one written in an old-fashioned, fine hand, on heavy, lavender-smelling paper. "This is an old lady who says she has two strong carriage horses, and she's never been able to reconcile herself to using automobiles, though her nephew gave her one for her last birthday, and it's stood in the carriage-house ever since. But she'll let us have the horses for farm work, and use the automobile, because it seems to her the best thing she can do to serve the country. Only she wants references, and she'll come out to see us and our farm, just to be certain everything is all right."

"Which, of course, it is," said Tom. "Well, Winnie, I vote we write to her and thank her, and ask her if she won't come out and look us over as soon as ever she can. We won't answer these other people till we hear from her—she's the best one so far."

"Very well," readily assented his sister, piling up the envelopes and strapping them together with an elastic.

She sat down immediately, and wrote to the old lady, asking her to set a time for coming out to see

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them, and referring her to their clergyman, Mr. Gedney, Mr. Lane, and the head of the town's national bank, whose two sons were in the Scouts. Then she hurried over to Louise's, where the Karonya girls were to wait every day for the motor. Mr. Lane had practically made it over to them for the time being.

She told them of her sudden luck in the matter of letters, and they decided at once that the old lady should be received at the farm. They had nearly finished the cleaning of the house. All that it needed now was a little arranging.

They did not intend to try to finish it properly. Each girl had her little camp cot, and a dresser made of boxes, and curtained by herself in cretonne. The kitchen was bare so far, but the school authorities had promised their whole equipment of gas range and utensils, on the promise of replacement of broken or worn out things at the end of the summer. In the dining room they had set up a long trestle table, the boards bought new at cost, the trestles left over from last summer's camp, and camp chairs around it.

"It's a shame to furnish a beautiful old house this way," said Helen discontentedly, standing still and sur-

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veying their work. "But I don't know what else we can do. I'll tell you one thing, girls, nobody need expect me to do another thing till I've done everything I can to that old furniture. I'm going to try to mend enough of it to furnish the parlor, or an end of it, anyway. Can anybody be spared to help me?"

"I'd love to help," said Adelaide. "There isn't anything more to do to the house that the rest can't do, and the chickens haven't come yet, and the garden-seeds needn't be planted for another week at the most."

So Helen and Adelaide armed themselves with hammers and nails and wooden pegs, and tackled the furniture. It looked very hopeless at first. There was an old armchair with one arm lying at its feet, a set of horsehair and mahogany chairs that were in all stages of dilapidation, an enormously long horsehair sofa, a queer thing that they decided after study of Helen's old furniture book was originally a fire-screen, and what were apparently the two halves of a round table. There were two sodden old carpeted hassocks, and another chair that was apparently from a church, with a pointed Gothic back—what wasn't broken away.

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They started on the six wretched chairs. They decided that the old lady would be upon them too soon for them to attempt any painting or varnishing. They would have to be content with mending for the present.

There was a missing arm or two, but mostly the trouble was with legs and seats. They used glue and pegs and slender nails as carefully as they could, and went to the expense of some ten-cent store cretonne, the checkerboard pattern, to recover the seats with. They wrapped the glued legs and arms with twine to hold them fast till they dried, and called the other girls to look. The results were so encouraging that more girls volunteered to help, and were set at recovering the hassocks, and putting cretonne into the frame of the fire-screen. The sofa needed only its carved back fastened on again and its seat pushed up higher, and the cross straps of webbing that held it up tightened. Of course, everything needed sandpapering and re-varnishing badly, but there was no time for that. The old lady wrote that she was coming out that Saturday, and that if all was well she would let them have the horses the following Monday.

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It was Friday when the girls heard.

"If she'd only said that *she* was coming Monday, instead of the horses," wailed Helen, "everything would have been done. As it is, there are those two half-tables that I *can't* seem to find out how to put together. There isn't a place in them anywhere that looks as if they'd ever been joined. We'll just have to set them up against the wall one each side the best fire-place, and tell her the truth."

"She isn't coming out here to award a prize for furnishings," Louise reminded Helen. "She's coming to see if we are really hardworking young persons who deserve horses. The more decent poverty we show the better chance of horses."

This didn't comfort Helen much. She was tired with hurrying up, and had set her heart on presenting such an attractive parlor that the old lady would be sure they were worthy of horses.

"She doesn't expect us to keep the horses in here," Louise reminded her again.

"Oh, you haven't *any* sense!" said Helen in exasperation, and flounced out of the room.

"Yes, I have," Louise called after her in a voice

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that carried beyond the front door. "If you really want to work, go out and tidy up the stables!"

As it was within a half hour of the time when they were to receive their expectant benefactress, and Helen still had to change to a clean blouse and wash her face and hands, the suggestion did nothing but make Helen crosser. She banged the tables against the walls, and stalked upstairs to the room that was to be hers. She and Louise and Winona had picked out rooms in a row, to be closer together. This is all very well when you're friends with your chum, but when you're out with her it's very annoying. Helen could hear Louise singing "Something To Do" at the top of her powerful voice as she splashed happily in her wash-basin. It did not soothe her.

She jerked on her own clean blouse, after she had washed dispiritedly, and sat down at the edge of the bed, too much upset to care whether the old lady came and went without being seen.

Presently she heard a motor. Mrs. Bryan and Mr. Gedney were to meet the old lady at the station, she knew, and bring her out. She sat still on the bed. What was the use of bothering, when, no matter how

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hard you worked, people just laughed at you instead of appreciating you? It was all very well for Louise to go ahead and work like a horse, and have people admire her—it was just because she was so much stronger than the rest of them. And it was all very well for people to pet Winnie because she had ideas, and made plans that worked. Winnie had a disposition like that naturally—she said herself that it was hard for her to feel unhappy, and that sometimes she was ashamed of herself at not taking things more sadly.

Helen gazed at a crack in the plaster and felt very much abused.

“They haven’t any of them got an artistic temperament. They don’t know how it feels,” she brooded.

There is no telling how long she would have sat there, feeling that the world was a cruel place, because she was interrupted in the middle by Winona.

“Oh, come on down, Helen,” Winona cried, dashing into the room. “Miss Barrison has come, and everything is going beautifully. She says she’s sure we’ll be good to her horses, and she’s going to let us have them. And she asked who had shown such clever-

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ness over the chairs and all, so I said you had, and I'd go get you. She knows lots about old furniture—come on down!”

Winnie's eyes were dancing and her cheeks were pink with excitement. Helen got off the bed, rather slowly, and followed her downstairs. She still felt unhappy, but there was no use sitting up in her room—and after all Louise's teasing seemed less terrible than it had when she ran off.

“This is the girl who fixed the furniture, Miss Barrison,” Winona explained.

Miss Barrison, who was a gentle, frail little old lady with white hair and a general air of being made of Dresden china, rose from the great armchair, where she had been sitting, and greeted Helen.

“I am so glad to meet someone who is interested in old furniture,” she said cordially, “because it is one of my own hobbies. I was afraid that you Camp Fire Girls did so much wood-chopping and—er—such strenuous things, that you had no interest in gentler pursuits.”

“If she calls hammering furniture together a gentle pursuit——!” said Louise under her breath. But

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Helen, somehow, wasn't disturbed by Louise's whisper. She was so glad to be able to get information about the furniture, that she sat down near Miss Barrison and began asking her questions directly. The other girls, seeing that the two were getting on so well, kept quiet. Adelaide and Winona stole away and made tea and toast, and arranged it on a tray, and brought it in.

"Will you pour it, Helen?" she heard Adelaide say softly over her shoulder.

She came out of her absorption in what Miss Barrison was saying with a start, and began to pour the tea on one of the old half tables that Adelaide and Winona drew away from the wall.

Now was her time to find out!

"Miss Barrison!" she said interestedly. "Can you tell me how these tables fasten together? I looked all over them both, and there aren't any signs of how to nail them, or anything."

Miss Barrison, about to take her first spoonful of tea, looked at her for a minute in surprise. Then she began to smile.

"My dear child!" she said. "Didn't you know those tables weren't meant to be fastened?"

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"Well, they stay together without, but——"

Helen began.

"They can be used together or separately, and that is the intention with which they were made. But nail them together—never!" said the little old lady with intense earnestness.

Helen gasped. "Goodness!" she said. "What you've saved me from!"

"This furniture is valuable," the old lady went on, looking around the room at it. "Is it yours?"

"Yes, it is theirs," said Mr. Gedney, unexpectedly entering into the conversation. The girls were about to contradict him, but mercifully did not.

"The owner of the house said especially that the boys and girls who were running the farm could have any old pieces of furniture that were left," he stated, as calmly as if he was asking Miss Barrison to have another sandwich.

"All this valuable furniture?" asked Miss Barrison.

"They're very rich, to begin with," answered Mr. Gedney. "This furniture was worth very little when it was in the state the girls found it. Helen has done miracles with it. I have his permit in writing."

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"I cannot help how rich the owners may have been," said Miss Barrison firmly, and Helen looked as if she thought so, too, "antique furniture is antique furniture."

Mr. Gedney laughed.

"It would be different if the house still belonged to the family that built it," he acknowledged, "but the present owners are people who bought it because they wanted an old country house, and then disliked the location. They are very rich, as I said, and not at all interested in old furniture or old families, or any such things. Mr. Firkins made his money in a very short time, and hasn't arrived at the point where he wants ancestors, or any of the things that go with them. I think the girls need not feel that they are wronging him."

Miss Barrison looked hungrily at the half-tables.

"If I were sure of that," she said, "I would ask if I might make an offer for these pieces."

Helen's heart leaped up. She hated to part with them, but if they brought enough to refurnish the long parlor, and put away some money for the ever-needy farming expenses!

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"Oh, don't you think we might consider them ours?" she asked.

"If you really are interested in the furniture, Miss Barrison——" began the Guardian.

"I really am," affirmed the little old lady.

"Then the thing for us to do is to have Mr. Gedney write to his friend and ask him if he meant this furniture when he said what he did. If he is still willing, why, then we needn't have any further scruples."

This seemed to settle it. Mr. Gedney said he would, and Miss Barrison said that she would make them an offer for it in writing as soon as it was certain that they could sell it to her. And then she took her departure.

"The horses will be down on Monday," she promised, taking her leave. "And, do you know," she added with a little twinkle in her eyes, "I find I like motoring after all!"

"It's awfully kind and good of you to let us have your horses," the girls assured her, "and we'll take very, very good care of them."

"I'm sure of that," she answered heartily.

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Helen turned back to the house with the others. She had quite forgotten about Louise's teasing, and she was surprised when Louise caught her around the waist, and said, "I'm sorry, Helen. You were tired to death, and I hadn't any business to tease you."

"I'd forgotten all about it," said Helen truthfully. "I was so pleased about the furniture."

"Isn't it splendid! Oh, dear, I wish I could do something grand for the farm! There's Winona gone and annexed two fine, fat horses, and you've practically sold the furniture for enough money to give us a wonderful helping hand—and all I have to my credit is a scrubbed henhouse!"

Helen laughed—you couldn't help it when Louise was mournful.

"Your turn will come soon enough," she said.

"If it doesn't, I'm going out to meet it," she promised.

Helen, knowing Louise as she did, had no doubt she told the truth.

Mr. Gedney sent a special delivery letter to his millionaire friend. He asked for another in reply. The millionaire friend did still better—he telegraphed.

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"You are welcome to every old stick on the premises," he said in his telegram. "Expert cleared out everything worth having when I bought house."

"He wasn't much of an expert," said Helen scornfully; but after that nobody could have scruples. They wrote on to Miss Barrison, not forgetting to give her news of her horses, that the furniture was theirs, and could be hers any time she wanted it; and she answered with a cash offer for the six forlorn chairs, the two half-table, and the long old davenport. She said she would give them seventy-five dollars apiece for each half-table, twenty-five apiece for the chairs—and she advised them to keep the sofa, because she wasn't prepared to offer more than fifty dollars, and it was worth much more than that.

"Two hundred and seventy-five!" said Helen. "Oh, how wonderful!"

"Would you keep the davenport?" Adelaide asked Helen on behalf of the other girls. All the girls felt that as Helen had been the only one to think of the furniture, she was the one to decide.

"I'd like to," said Helen wistfully. "It seems a shame not to keep *any* of it. Could we, do you think, Nannie?"

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"Of course, we could," said her stepmother.

So they wrote back to Miss Barrison accepting her offer, they sent her the furniture, she sent them a check, and they put it in bank. It looked like a great deal of money.

"Now, we'll buy pigs," said Louise. "Pork's going up!"

CHAPTER SIX

THE ADVENTURE OF JAMES AND HENRIETTA

TIME went on. Lessons, also, went on—because the school authorities had been forced to say that a passing mark was necessary for admission to the farm. They had the farm, so to speak, in their pockets, as Tom remarked, so there was no appeal. The boys were given from two to three days a week off when it was needed, for planting and plowing. And—it felt as if things were turning very much upside down—long before the usual commencement day all the Scouts and all of the girls of Camp Karonya were told that the farm needed them now, more than their lessons, and that there would be no more lessons for them this year.

It was still cold weather and rainy off and on. But that did not matter, especially to the boys and girls. They made one joyous dash in unison to the farm, and settled down in its houses very happily.

The chickens had come long since, and had been the object of daily pilgrimages by Louise. The two

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Scouts who had been at the farm—not the same ones, but always two—for some time, had seen to it that nobody stole them.

They seemed to get on very well, running about and hunting the many worms the wet weather produced, and laying with a gratifying regularity as soon as Easter was over. Louise collected eggs faithfully, and sold them for two cents a dozen below market price to the families of the girls. She could have marketed a great many more than she had. The money was turned back in chicken-feed, and what she politely called cosmetics for the hens. Their feathers had to be sprayed, the government chicken-bulletin told her, and she diligently sprayed accordingly.

"The hens and I are really getting fond of each other," she informed her friends, who were sitting around the big fireplace in a happy but weary circle, after a long, drizzly day employed in dropping seed-corn under the direction of the Scouts.

"It's more than the rest of us are," said Marie. "Do you know that they've found out how to fly over the wire I put around the vegetable garden?"

"No—have they though? How clever of them!"

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said Louise proudly, sticking out one foot to the blaze.

"Yes—dear little pets!" said Marie sarcastically. "I've spent the last three days transplanting the cabbage, and to-day while we were all out in the fields your cunning little hens scratched it all up."

"Goodness, Marie, that is serious!" said Louise, startled out of her affection for the chickens for the moment. "Did you put them back?"

Marie shook her head.

"I just found it out before supper. I was too dead tired to do anything about it. And it's cold and windy out, and I think your chickens are horrid little brutes!"

"They certainly are," said Louise remorsefully. "Have the cabbages got to be put back to-night?"

Here Mrs. Bryan interposed.

"No. It's raining, a soft little drizzle, and the cabbages won't be hurt. To-morrow morning will do for that."

The girls sank back with sighs of relief.

"Then there's nothing to do till to-morrow," quoted Louise. "And oh, I'm glad! Dropping that corn just about did me up."

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She lay back in a more comfortable attitude on one of the wicker couches that the money for the old chairs had enabled them to buy, and reached out for another cup of cocoa, of which there was a big kettle standing on the hearth, near enough to the fire to keep warm.

"It's one of the times when you're mighty glad there's nothing to do but purr and look forward to going to bed," added Winona, sipping her cocoa and looking up from the pillows on the floor where she had curled herself.

Nobody answered. The rest of the girls were too tired and sleepy to do more than talk. And after Mrs. Bryan's assurance that the cabbages could be left till the next day even Louise and Marie lost interest in the outside world.

Suddenly there came a thundering knock on the old front door—somebody was pounding hard with the knocker.

"Goodness, what's that?" said everybody.

Florence Merriam was, at all times, more awake and alert than most of the people around her. She was up and at the door before the rest of the girls had more than sat up.

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"Oh, it's just you," they heard her say in a disappointed tone as she opened the door. "I thought it was an ancestral ghost."

"Well, it isn't," said the familiar tones of Billy Lee. "It's us. Open the door and let us in, Florence. Mr. Gedney sent us to find out——"

He came in before he finished, and came over to Mrs. Bryan, wet as he was.

"Mrs. Bryan, Mr. Gedney asked me to come over and find out if you or any of the girls had seen James or Henrietta."

"James or Henrietta!" Mrs. Bryan repeated in dismay. "Are they lost?"

Now James and Henrietta were the decorous names that Miss Barrison had bestowed on her two sedate horses, who had been doing excellent work on the farm for a month now, and when Billy said that they were lost there was general excitement.

"Have a cup of cocoa and tell us about it," Mrs. Bryan invited him.

"Well, I will," said Billy, sitting down and putting his cap beside him, on a wicker chair that he thought his wetness couldn't hurt. "We used the

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horses for plowing the lower lot, over behind the peach-orchard, all day, and put them in the stables, as we thought, all safe and serene, with their dinners. And we might not have known they were gone until tomorrow if it hadn't occurred to Lonny Hughes that he'd dropped his Ingersoll watch in the straw. He said he remembered something making a little noise when he put in the fodder. So he took a lantern and went out. And he found his watch all right enough. But the stable door was pried open and the horses weren't there. Before we started to hunt I was sent up here to make sure the girls hadn't done it for a lark."

"Lark, indeed!" said Winona. "Why, Billy, we're all so tired with the work we've done to-day that I, for one, wouldn't get up to go and see Mary Queen of Scots led to execution."

Billy looked downcast.

"Then nobody here knows anything about the horses?"

"Not a soul, I'm sorry to say," Mrs. Bryan answered him for Camp Karonya.

"I'm sorry, too. Thank you," said Billy briefly, saluted and was off.

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He left consternation behind him.

"James and Henrietta gone! And we promised Miss Barrison we'd take such care of them!" exclaimed Winona unhappily.

"And we're more responsible for them than the boys are," chimed in Helen, "because we asked for them."

"I was the one who asked for them," said Winona, as if it was something wrong she was acknowledging.

"And it was very clever of you to think of it," said Mrs. Bryan quickly. "Now, girls, there's no use of worrying. The boys are going to hunt for the horses, and they'll find them if they can be found."

"I'm going to hunt, too," said Winona resolutely. "I'm responsible for those horses being here—you know I am, Opeechee!"

"Why couldn't we go down and tell the Scouts that we'll hunt over the farm, and leave them free to hunt outside?" suggested Adelaide brilliantly.

"That's a splendid idea," said Mrs. Bryan. "Get your waterproofs and searchlights, girls, and one of you had better go over and suggest it."

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"We ought to have a telephone connecting us with the farmhouse," said Louise, as a Blue Bird snatched her light from the shelf where the girls' lights were kept, and sped down the hill. "Next time there's a breathing space I'm going to see if the Scouts won't do it."

The Blue Bird came breathlessly back with the message that the Scouts were very grateful, and that those who hadn't already spread over the farm to hunt would go out to the roads, and that the girls should send any Scouts they found on the farm back to the farmhouse to report, and be given a direction to hunt in.

So it was done. The girls were each assigned to a part of the farm, and started off, in pairs.

"I don't believe the horses are on the farm at all," said Winona suddenly, stopping and addressing Louise, who was with her.

"No, neither do I," said Louise. "But the boys are attending to that. We're merely giving them a chance to hunt outside."

"There are enough girls without us to hunt the farm over," Winona went on. "Louise, are you game

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to go hunt a place I know, a place the boys mayn't know about?"

"Indeed I am!" said Louise. "We have no business in the world to do it, you know—but let's!"

"I can't help whether we have or not!" said Winona. "I don't want to feel that there's the least little chance in the world of finding those horses that Miss Barrison trusted to us, that we missed."

"I'm with you!" said Louise; for when Winona took that tone Louise knew that she was going to carry things through.

"Do you know that little path that goes down past the stable?" asked Winona.

Louise nodded.

"But I never followed it far."

"I did, one day when I was following an early bird that was hopping and hopping along, as cunning as he could be."

"Was he looking for the worm?" inquired Louise, who would have made jokes on her deathbed.

"I don't know, because he flew away so soon," said Winona. "But I kept on following. There is a path that branches off from the main path—and that

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isn't very big, either—and goes into the bushes—just a little slender path. And after it's gone along the bushes away, it gets to be wider, and goes on to a spring—still in underbrush you'd think was too thick for horses. But it isn't. I think they used to take horses to drink there.”

“And you think the boys don't know about it?” asked Louise.

“I don't think they do. Anyway—come on!”

They had no business in the world to do it, as they were told afterwards. Two girls alone should have stayed on the farm, where they were sure to be safe—for if a man will steal a horse he is quite capable of striking or even shooting a girl sometimes. But this never occurred to Winona. The only thing in her head was that they must find the horses if they could.

They slipped down the path very silently, guiding themselves with their electric lights, which they only flashed on once in a while. It was easy enough to follow the main path. When they found the second path it got harder. The girls were drenched through by the wet bushes in a few minutes.

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"Win, you're crazy!" Louise whispered. "No horse alive could get through this. It's hard for us."

"It isn't. There were old horse-tracks on this path," Winona answered obstinately. So Louise said nothing more, and they crept softly on their wet way, using the lights as little as they could.

"See?" whispered Winona presently.

"Oh, yes," grumbled Louise, "if a horse could fly this far, he could walk the rest of the way."

The path had widened till two people could walk comfortably on it abreast.

Suddenly Winona gave what would have been a cry if she had not suppressed it, and clutched Louise.

"Look!" she said.

There was a horse-track in the path, so fresh that the rain had not yet washed it away.

"They've been here," said Louise in a tense whisper, and the two girls went on, with no more said.

The tracks continued, and soon there was no doubt in the girls' minds that they were on the right path to finding the horses. For a few moments they were undecided as to what to do. Louise thought it might be better to go back and get the boys, but Winona re-

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minded her that they had only their bicycles, and that no bicycle could go through the kind of a path that they were following. Two girls on foot could not expect to catch up with men on horseback—if the men were riding the horses. But there was a chance that they were leading them, because it would have been hard to ride through this tangled woodland.

“Lou, do you hear anything?” Winona whispered after ten minutes more of silent trailing.

“Yes,” Louise answered under her breath. There was a sound like crackling leaves and branches; as if two horses were nibbling.

They said no more to each other, but with one impulse deserted the path and slid along as noiselessly as they could behind the bushes. And as the path turned and they came to the spring they saw that they had found what they were looking for. The horses were there—James and Henrietta, as large and natural as life. But with them, curled very uncomfortably under rubber blankets in the shelter of a tree, lay two large, rough-looking men.

“What shall we do?” Louise dared to whisper, at the risk of waking the horse-thieves.

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"Get them," said Winona resolutely. "Can you jump on James' back, if I take Henrietta?"

The girls had practiced that particular feat on saw-horses in the gym all winter, and on these real animals for a month now. Louise nodded.

"The trouble's getting their bridles loose," she said.

They looked again. The horses' halters were still on—not bridles, and the ends of them were flung around a projecting limb. They would have to be detached by hand.

"Can you guide Henrietta by your knee, the cavalry way the boys showed us?" whispered Winona.

Louise nodded.

"Then we'll cut the halters," said Winona, and took out her pocket-knife.

It was dangerous work. It was very dangerous, and when the girls told about it afterwards they were scolded as much as they were admired. Anything might have happened.

But as a matter of fact nothing did. The two girls slid out of the bushes, as their training had showed them, almost without noise. They crept up behind the horses, and leaped to their backs as they had done so

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many days that the horses were quite calm and used to it. Then Winona, before she tried cutting, gave her horse's halter a quick jerk—and it came away from the limb. Louise did not try. She cut hers. Then they lashed the horses sharply, and were down the path whence they had come, out of reach of the men, who did not wake till the girls had galloped a couple of hundred feet.

Winona and Louise, hurrying on the horses, heard the men running behind them, and galloped the faster. They heard hoarse shouts, and then swearing. The feet splashed on behind them till they were too near the original path for the safety of gentlemen who stole horses.

Then the girls drew their horses into a walk.

"Louise," whispered Winona to her friend, "did you hear those men swearing?"

Louise nodded.

"I couldn't very well help it, considering that they were swearing at us," she said. "What of it?"

"They were swearing in German!" said Winona.

"German!" said Louise excitedly. "Do you think they were soldiers?"

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Winona laughed.

"No—and I don't want to have spy-fever," she answered. "But I do think they were Germans who live around here somewhere, and who don't want us to do any farming that they can help."

Louise shuddered happily.

"It sounds like melodrama!" she said.

"But just think," Winona reminded her, as they rode on up to the farmhouse, "how many melodrama things really do happen? Think how the grain-elevators are burned, and how the powder-works keep blowing up, and the munition factories. And think of the Lusitania."

"I do," said Louise. "If I hadn't, maybe I'd have gone off and spent the summer with my aunt at the seashore, as she wanted me to do, and gone to hops instead of planting them."

Louise's aunt had come on to visit the family. She had a good deal of money and no children, and she had wanted Louise to spend the summer with her instead of going out on the farm with the Camp Fire Girls. Louise had declined on the spot, and this was the first time she had even mentioned it.

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"Did you want to go much?" Winona asked curiously. They were at the farmhouse door by now, and there was no time for more talking.

"Yes, I did," said Louise frankly. "There wasn't any kind of good times she didn't promise me. But—good gracious! I couldn't! And I don't think giving up that was much to do for your country, when you think of the boys in this very village dropping everything and enlisting."

They slid off their horses, and rapped on the farmhouse door.

There was no one inside except Mrs. Gedney, who was waiting up for her husband and the boys.

"Oh, Mrs. Gedney, we have the horses!" they cried.

She could scarcely believe it till she came out and saw the animals for herself.

"Well, you certainly were lucky!" she said. "Where did you find them?"

"Oh, just down a path a little way," answered Winona, her dimples beginning to show.

"Mrs. Gedney, we've had the most wonderful adventure with German spies!" said Louise impressively.

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"We tried to bring them home prisoner, but they wouldn't come all the way. They were shy little things."

"My 'child, do you really mean that?" asked Mrs. Gedney. She was a plump, gentle soul, who still felt that war was a mistake, no matter what your reasons were, and she was sure nobody could be a worse person than she was, so in her heart she didn't really believe there were any spies.

"Well, almost," said Louise. "Gracious, I wish one of those Scouts would turn up! He could do a good deed right this minute by taking these horses into the stables."

"Let's call one," suggested Winona practically, and, putting her hand to her mouth, gave an Indian war-whoop of which she and Tom were very proud, warranted to wake any dead within four miles.

Not one, but four Scouts came dashing up, under the impression that it was Tom in trouble. When they found that the girls had really found the horses the excitement was wild. One of the boys, who was the camp bugler, called on his bugle, and summoned in all the Scouts and girls within hearing, while two others took James and Henrietta back to their stables, where

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they locked the stable door after the horses were stolen with rather better results than the proverb generally supposes to be the case.

Then the girls had to tell their whole story. They went into the farmhouse kitchen and steamed, in the comforting heat of the kitchen stove, while Winona and Louise alternately took up the tale.

When they came to the point where they both heard the men swear with a German accent, Winona stopped to say, "Couldn't they have been pro-Germans, who were trying to block our farm-work? I don't want to be silly but it seems so to me."

Mrs. Bryan, who had come in just in time to hear the tale, was inclined to think that Winona *was* silly. She thought that there were plenty of men who had German accents, who could see something desirable in stealing good carriage-horses, or work-horses, without their being particularly patriotic about it.

"Did you see what they looked like?" everybody asked.

"I didn't," admitted Louise. "They were all curled up under rubber things."

"One had rough light hair sticking out from under his," Winona reminded her.

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"We didn't look back at them," added Louise.
"We were in too much of a hurry!"

"You've had a long, hard day, girls," their Guardian reminded them, "and I think you must want to be in bed. I know I do."

"I believe I am sleepy," yawned Louise. "Thief hunting is tiring. Come on, Winnie. To-morrow we'll be Sherlock Holmeses and try to find them in the village over by the river."

Mrs. Bryan was going to have to wait up a little while longer for the rest of the girls, but she thought it would be better to do it at the manor-house. So she collected her camp, and they started off.

"You certainly ought to have some sort of a reward for finding those horses," said Mr. Gedney, half-laughing, as they went.

"Finding them was all the reward I want," said Winona. "Think if we hadn't been able to return them to Miss Barrison! I'd have wanted to die!"

"A reward?" said Louise. "I'll take a reward. I have a vegetable garden—or we have—full of up-rooted cabbages. Anybody who wants to signify their admiration of our noble deeds can come over to-morrow early and put them back the way they belong!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

MRS. GARY'S STOCK

SURE enough, the Scouts came over next morning before the sun was strong, and had those baby cabbages reset and the earth raked down about them, before breakfast.

The boys and girls did not eat together, after all. There was a big cook-stove, and a gas range, too, in the farmhouse, so Mrs. Gedney borrowed two of the girls regularly. They were changed every week, so that the routine would not be too tiring, and the Scouts helped with the clearing up and washing up.

The old camp routine was followed in the manor-house; the girls were in shifts, and took turns doing the housework. Louise, Winona, and Marie looked after the chickens, the vegetable garden and the dairy—helped, of course, by the others.

As to the dairy, that had seemed, at first, the biggest piece of work the Camp Fire had tackled. Planting vegetables wasn't difficult—it was fascinating to watch them grow, and the Blue Birds saw to the weeding.

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As for helping the boys plant, that was merely doing what they were told. But when the dairy was suggested to the girls, they were a little afraid. To begin with, cows had to be bought. Then they had to be milked, it was understood, and then there had to be butter made.

"It sounds thrilling," Louise summed up, "but none of us ever met a cow near to."

"We can look them up in books," said Marie obstinately. "I have a government bulletin that tells all the points of a cow, and another book, that fat Bailey one that cost almost two dollars, with lots about cows in it, and rules for winning prizes with butter and milk."

There was a rush for the book, and three girls at once opened and turned over the leaves till they came to the cow part.

"This seems clear enough," said Winona. "And anyway, milk is very, very dear. So's butter. If we can make enough butter maybe we can sell some. There's our whole town willing to buy anything from us that it can get a little under market price."

"That's all right," objected Adelaide Hughes. "But who will take charge of the dairy?"

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"I will if nobody else wants the job," said Winona. "Louise has her chickens, and the eggs to sell, and Marie has the vegetables. I'll take the cows. I don't see why I shouldn't like cows. Mr. Gedney can help us pick out the kind we ought to have, and we can see how much we can spare to buy with."

"Go ahead, then, you," said Marie tiredly for the other girls. "And let me tell you, I never did anything in my life as tiring as looking after vegetables. At night when I want to go to sleep I see rows and rows of them. And then I dream that German spies get in and dig them up, and horses and chickens—Winona, if the cows you're going to buy should come and dig up my little bush beans that I have just planted, I'll make them into beefsteaks. I'm a dangerous woman."

"Cows don't do such things," said Winona soothingly, and without very much knowledge. "And, anyway, they couldn't jump the wire."

"I thought the cow jumped over the moon," put in a wide-eyed Blue Bird. "If it could do that it could jump your wire, Marie."

Everybody laughed, and Marie stopped worrying.

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It was not a meeting or anything like that, but all the girls were around the fire, for the nights were chilly still, and it was easy to talk things over.

"I vote we appoint Winona to go with Mr. Gedney, or anybody she can get, and buy us as many cows as we can afford," said Adelaide lazily.

Adelaide was doing routine work, and, like all the rest of them, working hard. Her specialty had been canning, but it was too early to can anything. So far she helped in the field and in the kitchen with the others. Mrs. Bryan, who knew she was not as robust as some of the others, although she was perfectly well and strong, tried to keep her from overworking.

"Suppose you go with Winona, Adelaide," she suggested. She thought it would give Adelaide a day more or less off, and the present routine of work was rather hard. The boys were so hard at work planting spring wheat that they had turned over some other work to the girls; whitewashing tree-trunks to keep pests away was the present task. Beside that there were their own tasks. Mrs. Bryan thought a leisurely day off would be a very good thing for Adelaide, who was so afraid of not doing her share of work that she generally did more than she should.

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"If you think I can be spared," Adelaide began.

"Of course, you can, or I wouldn't spare you," the Guardian replied matter-of-factly. "So with the consent of the Camp Fire, I think you'd both better go as soon as you can secure Mr. Gedney."

Securing the hard-worked Scoutmaster was not the easiest thing in the world. But he was alive to the necessity of cows, and the second day after it had been suggested the three started off, Mr. Gedney on his bicycle, and the girls on bicycles loaned them by the Scouts for the occasion.

For a wonder, the day was sunny and clear, and there was a breeze—almost too much breeze going, as they found.

"If it only doesn't turn around and push against us coming back, too," said Adelaide mournfully.

Winona laughed.

"If it does, I'll take hold of the handlebar and pull you along. Goodness, Adelaide, how you like to borrow trouble! Now, the only thing I'm worrying about is whether we're going to be able to afford enough cows to make life worth living."

"Cows," Mr. Gedney informed them, "cost about seventy-five dollars apiece."

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"Oh!" said Winona. "And the seed so far has cost about five hundred dollars, and the boys say a fertilizer is worth its weight in gold—Mr. Gedney, *how* are we going to manage!"

"It's going to be rather close sledding," said Mr. Gedney seriously.

So far the girls and boys had all paid board, six dollars a week apiece, the little girls five. This more than ran the table and paid other necessary incidental expenses. Louise's chickens laid nobly, and the eggs, which she sold at fifty cents a dozen, brought in from four to seven dollars a day. The chickens were fed from the table scraps, and cost about a dollar a day besides for other food. Louise hoarded the chicken money, for the purpose of buying pigs, she said.

"There's no trouble about paying for the cows," Winona went on. "We have the money. But how on earth to support those cows once we have them?"

"They can be turned out to pasture," Mr. Gedney told her. "That will be a good deal. But, of course they will have to be fed besides."

"The money we pay in now buys us milk and butter enough to go around," meditated Winona. "It

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seems to me that we ought to be able to make more money by selling milk and butter from the cows. And perhaps we could use skim milk for our own cooking. How much milk do you think a cow ought to give a day, Mr. Gedney?"

"In my young days about twelve quarts was right," he said. "I don't know whether they expect more of cows than they used to."

"That's twenty-four quarts a day," counted Winona intently.

"Look out, Win, you'll be into that tree!" Adelaide warned her.

Winona laughed and watched where she was going more carefully, but she went on with her calculations.

"And how much butter?"

"Oh, I know that," chimed in Adelaide unexpectedly. "The Bailey book says that no cow **who** gives less than twelve pounds of butter a week ought to be invited to join cow clubs, or something like that."

"Twenty-four pounds?" calculated Winona, taking more care not to run into things, but continuing to count up. "And butter's from forty-five cents a pound up. Butter like ours ought to sell for more. Say

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twelve dollars a week from those cows. *I think they'll more than support themselves. I think they ought to support Louise's beloved pigs, too.*"

"The best way would be to use the stuff ourselves, and turn the money we buy milk and butter with now, on to the fodder," said Mr. Gedney. "Two cows would just about do it. If we could afford three—but I don't think we can."

"I never realized what a lot of difference it made whether you could afford things before!" said Winona.

"I did," said Adelaide, who had kept house for her father for two years.

"Well I don't care," said Winona gallantly. "I believe we'll come out way ahead. I don't see how we can help it."

"Here's the place," said Mr. Gedney, and they went up a road that led to a low, comfortable-looking red farmhouse.

"Oh, I've been here before!" said Winona, "last year when we were buying stuff for the camp. Mrs. Gary lives here, and her three sons. She did have cows—I remember now."

Mrs. Gary, who came to the door herself to see

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them, looked different from what they remembered her—older, it seemed to Winona, and more tired-looking. But she welcomed them in as friendly a fashion as ever.

“So it's cows you want to buy this year, instead of milk?” she said. “Well, well!”

“We've taken the old farm with the big house on it, and we want to buy cows,” Winona explained, coming straight to the point, as she always did. “This is the Scoutmaster, Mr. Gedney. He knows all about cows.”

“I'm glad of that,” answered Mrs. Gary, smiling, “for I wouldn't want you to choose without knowing whether you were getting good or bad ones.”

Mr. Gedney asked here if they might see the animals in question, and she led the way to her dairy, and through that to the cow-stable.

“Dear old cows!” said Winona. “Look, Adelaide, I remember this one, the red one, from last year. I got to be great friends with her—why, I believe she remembers me!”

Sure enough, the alderney was lifting her head, and giving a little polite moo, as if she did remember.

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"I used to bring you clover to eat, and things like that, whenever I came—I believe you remember, you nice old thing!" exclaimed Winona.

"Of course, she remembers," Mrs. Gary said. "Cows have a great deal of intelligence. In fact, I never had much to do with any animal that I didn't find it had more intelligence than most people credited it with."

"Is this one of the cows you want to sell?" asked Mr. Gedney. "I should think you had no more than enough for your own dairy work."

"I'm not going on with it," she answered quietly. "I can't get the help."

"Can't get the help!" said Winona. "Why, what about the boys?"

"You ought to go on," said Mr. Gedney before she could answer. "There never was a time when dairy products brought as much as they do now."

Mrs. Gary looked as if she wished they would stop.

"Bert and Ralph have enlisted," she said, "and it takes all Harry can do to manage the rest of the farm, with my help."

She was very quiet about it, but they could see that she felt badly.

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"I congratulate you on having boys like those," said Mr. Gedney, and that was all that was said about it then.

Winona was very quiet. She was thinking.

"Mrs. Gary," she said suddenly, after they had exhaustively inspected the last cow, and Mr. Gedney showed signs of being about to make offers, "if you had help would you think of selling the cows?"

"Certainly not, dear," said Mrs. Gary in surprise. "But help's almost impossible to get this year. I have to do it, and that's all about it."

"Are there other cows we could get?" Winona went on.

Mrs. Gary smiled a little.

"There's always things to sell, if people want to buy," she answered.

"How much help do you need?" persisted Winona. "This is the last question I'll ask," she added, smiling. "Truly, I don't mean to be inquisitive."

"I could do with two," Mrs. Gary answered consideringly. "But there's no use talking, I can't get anybody. I've tried hard enough, but there's so much factory work to do nobody'll do farm work."

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"I think you could," said Winona. She sat down on the arm of one of Mrs. Gary's red plush rockers and looked very earnest minded about it, but before she had time to go on Mr. Gedney interposed.

"I'm sorry, Winona, but I can't spare one of the boys, if that's what you mean. Not steadily. They might come over and help off and on when things are slack."

"That isn't what I mean—nor the Camp Karonya girls, either. We're all working hard. It's Camp Wah-wah-tay-see I'm thinking of."

"The other camp?" asked Mr. Gedney.

Winona nodded.

"They're doing Red Cross work, but they can't spend the whole blessed summer taking courses. And, anyway, I don't see actually what use it's going to be to them—now. They're too young to do any real nursing."

"They were going to knit a lot, too," Adelaide reminded her.

"I don't care. They're just as able as we are to do farm work, and abler, because they've specialized on gym work and Health Craft. Mrs. Gary, will you

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hold on to the cows a day or so, and if I could get you three Camp Fire Girls, anywhere from twelve to fourteen, could you run the dairy with them?"

"Indeed I could!" said Mrs. Gary thankfully, "and I'd thank heaven for the chance. Nobody knows how I hated the idea of giving up the cows. I love the work, only I couldn't get a soul, and the boys——"

She stopped, as if she was afraid of talking too much about the boys.

"I think it's only fair you shouldn't have to be upset just because the boys are being patriotic," said Winona earnestly.

Mrs. Gary smiled.

"Bless your little old-fashioned heart!" she said. "I sent the boys willingly, though I don't deny I'd rather they hadn't gone. It's pretty lonesome. But if you can get me girls who really wanted to help, I'd be glad. Would \$20.00 a month be too little apiece? That isn't as much as I'd pay men, but I think it would just about take three of them to do two men's work."

"I am sure that would be enough," said Winona.

As a matter of fact, she had not thought of having the girls paid at all—her idea had been to have them

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volunteer their work; but it came to her as Mrs. Gary spoke that perhaps they might not want to do it for nothing.

"They can tell her they won't accept money for it if they want to," she thought.

"I think you are quite right, Winona," said Mr. Gedney, "though you've made me waste a good working day," he added with a twinkle in his eye. "Very well, Mrs. Gary, we'll leave it this way—we'll take your cows if you can't get the girls to work for you. Meanwhile, we'll go down to James Pearce's stock-farm, and get an option on three of his cows, in case you keep yours. Is that all right?"

"That's all right, and very kind of you," said Mrs. Gary. "And thank you over again, Miss Winona."

She made them stay while she got them what she called a "bite," which was very much more than that, and included peach jam that Adelaide took a professional interest in. When she found that Adelaide was interested in canning and preserving, nothing would do but that she must take a basket of jellies, with the receipts for them. They went off, finally, with the basket swinging from Adelaide's handlebar.

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"I got the reward," laughed Adelaide, "and you did the work, Winnie."

Winona laughed, too.

"Don't worry about that. I'm going to help eat the reward to-night. I wonder how I can get word to the other camp quickest."

"Very simply," Mr. Gedney told her unexpectedly, "if you are willing that Adelaide and I should go on to the stock-farm without you. Ride back to the farm, and have one of the boys saddle one of the horses for you. It's too wet to plow to-day. Think you can stand riding in, after all this ride?"

"Oh, good! Of course I can!" she cried. "Listen, my children, and you shall hear——"

"You'll look rather like Paul Revere," laughed Adelaide, "especially if you ride in in your working clothes."

The working clothes were ordinary camp clothes. The girls wore khaki bloomers most of the time, with khaki middies to match. When they were dressed up they wore the Camp Fire Uniform, red tie, white blouse and middy hat, and blue serge skirts, but they found that the white blouses got soiled in the morning, when

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they were doing actual work with the ground, so they had taken to khaki, with very good results.

"I won't have time to change," said Winona consideringly.

She turned around, and made all possible haste back to the farm, leaving the fate of the cows to the others.

"You had better not try to get back to-night, Winnie," counseled Mrs. Bryan. "You can leave the horse in Mrs. Greene's stable, I am sure."

Mrs. Greene was the mother of two of the girls, and kept a horse and carriage.

"I'm sure, too," said Lilian Greene, who was near.

So, in a very short time after a Blue Bird had been sent over to the boys with the message, Tom Merriam appeared with James, saddled and ready to be ridden.

Winona jumped on him with the same jump she had used the other night, as her sister observed admiringly, and was off.

Her mother was delighted to see her and still more delighted to know that she was to spend the night.

"All I have to do is to telephone," Winona said, "I don't have to do anything else."

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She had seen to the horse before she came to her own house.

There were all sorts of messages from Florence and Tom. Mrs. Merriam was a little worried for fear her children were working too hard, but Winona told her that none of the boys and girls were sick. The work seemed to agree with them.

Then she took a hot bath and slipped on her kimono, which she had left behind when she went in for the strenuous life, and lay down to telephone luxuriously.

She started by getting Miss Dustin, the head of the other camp, on the telephone.

"Miss Dustin, are all the girls in Camp Wah-wah-tay-see very, very busy?" she asked, when she had told who she was, and given news of the farm.

"We're keeping at it pretty well," Miss Dustin told her, "but I still wish that we had taken the farm to do, and you little wretches had stayed at home to learn nursing and knitting."

Winona laughed.

"We don't, we're having a wonderful time! But, Miss Dustin—you wouldn't have three nice, hard-working girls to give away, would you?"

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Miss Dustin was alert on the spot.

"What do you mean, Winnie? Do you need more help on the farm? I think almost any of my girls would come like a shot! I would, I know, with half an excuse!"

Miss Dustin taught gymnastics, and she was one of the most energetic people Winona had ever known.

Winona shook her head, quite forgetting that it couldn't be seen over the phone.

"No, that isn't quite it. But I have a place that needs about three girls."

"You have? Tell me about it!" demanded Miss Dustin. "I don't know that I won't take it myself."

So Winona told her.

"It's a truck farm and dairy," she explained, "and two of the three sons who helped their mother run it have gone off to enlist. One's at a training-camp and one's with the Naval Reserves. The third one is nineteen, so he didn't go. They have three or four cows, four, I think, and a horse and cart, and a lot of vegetables. It wouldn't be such hard work. And she'd pay the girls."

"I am perfectly certain she can have more girls

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than she wants," the little teacher's voice came back briskly. "How long are you here for, Winnie?"

"Till I get Mrs. Gary her help," said Winona placidly.

Miss Dustin laughed.

"That won't take you long. Will you stay where you are till I can get in touch with my girls? Then I'll call you again."

Accordingly Winona remained where she was, on the couch, with the receiver balanced on her chest, and napped a little. She had discovered herself to be capable of sleeping on the wing, so to speak, nowadays, since she had been working on the farm.

Miss Dustin called up again in ten minutes.

"Three of the girls will be delighted to go any time they're wanted," she said. "Mrs. Gary can write them and give particulars. They will start Monday if she wants them then."

"Oh, good!" said Winona.

Miss Dustin gave her the names of the girls, and they settled the details of the arrangement in a little while.

"I must go," said Winona to her mother. "I've got what I came for."

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"Such a little while!" said Mrs. Merriam. "Winona, I think you and Tom ought to come back over the week-end. We've scarcely seen you for a month."

Winona said she would if she could, and mounted her steed and rode back to the farm.

So they never had Mrs. Gary's cows.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE RACING COW

THE cows from the stock farm were bought very uneventfully. They were "just cows," as Winona said.

"I believe animals brought up in big lots are like orphan-asylum children," she told Louise, after she had tried to pet Jenny, Bossy, and Royal Rose, and had them act as if she was nothing whatever in their lives. "They haven't any personal feelings."

"A cow should have gentle and refined and feminine characteristics," rejoined Louise. "The Bailey book says so. These cows are doubtless too shy and shrinking to respond when you pet them."

"Oh, Louise, nonsense!" remonstrated Winona. "No book would say that."

"Look for yourself," said Louise, and went and got the book and it did say nearly that.

"Now, the next thing is to milk these brutes, I suppose," said Winona, eyeing Royal Rose rather apprehensively. "Mr. Gedney said he'd send one

THE RACING COW

of the boys down to-night to show us, but don't you think we might try it ourselves, first? It would be lovely if they came, and found that we knew how already."

The two girls were out in the barn, sitting near the cows. The cows looked at them, it seemed to them, rather scornfully. Winona giggled.

"Oh, Louise, doesn't that cow named Jenny look just like old Mrs. Biddle that was always saying she didn't approve of modern trends in the rearing of the young? Don't you know how she used to put her chin up that way and look surprised but rather gratified that we were as bad as she'd thought we were going to be, when we went by on hikes?"

The lady in question *was* unusually like a cow, except that she wore black-rimmed glasses, and the two giggled reprehensibly.

"We'll call her Mrs. Biddle!" declared Louise.

"We will!" said Winona. "But suppose she should come out to inspect us?" she added. "How would she like a cow being named after her?"

"Oh, we'll tell her it was a high honor, and strike her for a contribution to the Red Cross on the strength of it!" said Louise, and they giggled again.

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"I'm going in to get 'Agriculture for Beginners,'" said Winona, springing up. "Good-bye, cowses. We'll be back in just a minute."

"You get the aggie book, and I'll get the stools and pails," said Louise.

So they separated, and came back in a few minutes with their respective implements.

"I wonder which one would be the least likely to kick," said Louise, eyeing the three animals, none of whom looked especially excitable.

"Let's try Bossy," said Winona. "I like her name best, and she looks more truly feminine than the others do."

"I knew a poem about cows once," said Louise irrelevantly. "Every stanza ended 'co-boss, co-boss, co-boss.' When the cows heard that they got very friendly and nice."

"Then you say it while I untie Bossy," ordered Winona.

Louise accordingly chanted it for five minutes—until Winona interrupted her to ask which side of a cow you ought to sit on.

"I've just thought of a funny story," said Louise.

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"There was a fussy old lady in England always running around asking men why they didn't enlist. And there was a man milking a cow on a farm, and she came ambling up to him——"

"Didn't she know he was needed on the farm?" interrupted Winona, much interested, and quite forgetting to do anything further to Bossy.

"Oh, no, people like that haven't much sense. And she said: 'My good man, why aren't you at the front?' And he said: 'Because ther' ain't any milk at that end!'"

"That *is* a good story," laughed Winona. "And it shows that you sit down at the lower end of a cow, too, doesn't it?" she added thoughtfully.

"I'll look in the book and see," said Louise. "Farm crops—no, that isn't it. 'Dairying succeeds best in a section where crops like cowpeas, clover, alfalfa, and corn are peculiarly at home.' Wonder why? Well, we're all right; the boys planted lots of all those. Let's see—domestic animals—horses, bees—I don't think this is an accurate book. When I was young horses and bees weren't both animals."

"Oh, never mind," answered Winona, "I can't

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wait all night, and the cow's getting worried-looking."

"Here we are—dairy-animals," said Louise.
"Farm-dairying—the dairy cow."

Winona untied the cow, led her out to the middle of the barn, sat down beside her on a stool, and waited for more instructions.

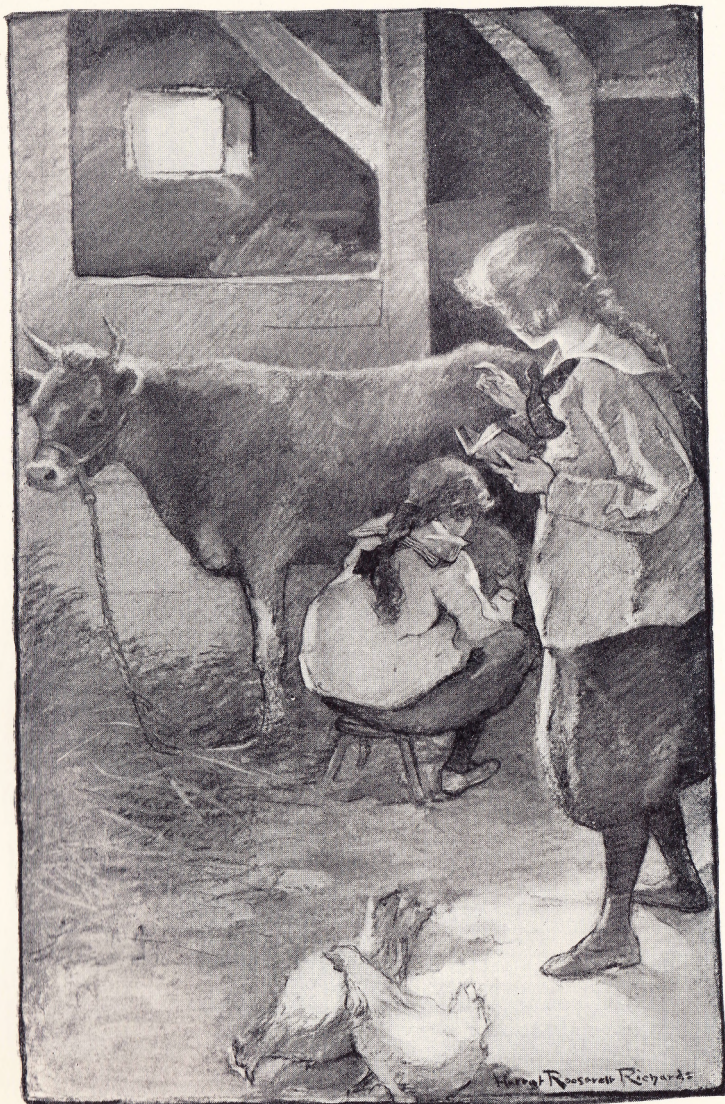
"The first few streams of the milk should be thrown away to avoid the germs," Louise condensed from her book. "But it never says a word about technique," she added.

"I've seen people do it," said Winona. She went over and washed her hands at the faucet outside the door, came back, and went valiantly to work at the cow.

"That isn't the way," said Louise when she had watched impatiently for a moment. "You aren't getting any milk."

"I know I'm not—what's the reason?" demanded Winona. "Do you think the wretched animal is gone dry?"

"Oh, no—they wouldn't dare sell us a dry cow," Louise reassured her. "They said it had just lately come in."



SHE WORKED ON INEFFECTUALLY FOR A FEW MINUTES LONGER



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"Come in where?"

"I don't know," Louise acknowledged, "but the way they said it sounded as if she had just started to have milk. Come into the power of giving milk, maybe."

"Well, she hasn't stayed there," said Winona with what, for her, was very near viciousness. "Oh, Bossy, *why* don't you work properly?"

She worked on ineffectually for a few minutes longer, making her hands ache. After one or two vain struggles she actually succeeded in squeezing out a little milk, which flowed into the bottom of the pail.

"Look, Louise!" she cried with triumph. "I do know how."

"I don't think you have it all down fine yet," said Louise doubtfully. "But go on, anyway. Maybe you'll get it."

"I *am* getting it," said Winona in a voice full of satisfaction. Sure enough, a little more milk began to pour into the bottom of the pail.

"Oh, good gracious, you didn't throw away the first few streams!" said Louise suddenly.

"So I didn't! I was so excited at getting any at

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all," explained Winona in a subdued voice, "that I forgot. Do you think it's really necessary?"

"Yes, I do," said Louise firmly. "You know there's no use doing it unless we do it the way the book says."

So Winona reluctantly tipped out the pint or so of milk she had collected with great effort, and started over again.

By this time Bossy was getting restless. She had looked over her shoulder several times, as if to say, "What are these creatures trying to do?" but so far she had stood still. Now, as Winona settled herself elaborately at the side of the cow, and tried to recommence operations, the cow seemed to feel she had stood enough. She was a gentle animal, and she did not lash out, but merely walked majestically back into her stall, leaving Winona, the stool and the pail alone in the middle of the floor.

"Now what are we to do?" demanded Winona helplessly. "You have the book, Lou—what does it say?"

"When a cow walks away, it shows that her feelings are hurt by being milked by Camp Fire Girls,"

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Louise read solemnly from the little red book, "and she should be apologized to——"

"Louise, you villain! That isn't there at all! Oh, please do realize this is a serious thing!" appealed Winona.

"Well, how do you suppose a thing like that would be in a book? We ought to have a manual of milking technique," protested Louise. "*I think the thing to do is to start on a fresh cow.*"

"Well, you can do it, then," said Winona.

"I wonder if exercise would help her any," mused Louise. "It does a horse, I know. All, right, we'll go on with this old cow, if it takes all day. Come on out, Bossy." She picked up the cow's halter and led her out again. The cow, rather to both girls' surprise, went.

"Why, she's getting tame," said Louise joyfully. "Pretty soon she'll know us. Come on, cow."

She led her out to the field behind the barn, and began to run up and down with her.

"She's getting quite happy," she panted to Winona, who had followed her. "After I've exercised her a little more she'll be a good old cow, and give us all the milk we want—won't you, Bossy?"

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"She looks awfully tired to me!" warned Winona. "I never heard of exercising cows. Are you sure it's the way to do?"

"I never heard it wasn't," said Louise; but she did slow up, much to Bossy's relief.

They led the much-tried animal back to the barn, and Louise recommenced operations.

"Not a drop!" said Louise ruefully, looking at the bottom of the pail.

"Well, she's patient, anyhow——" Winona began from the stall where she had perched herself. She stopped in the middle of her sentence—she had to.

Bossy, the patient, lashed out with her heels as agilely as a mule, and Louise barely saved herself in time. She did not save the milk pail, but that did not matter, because it was empty.

"What do you suppose is the matter with her?" demanded Winona. "Do you suppose she isn't the right kind of a cow?"

"She can't be the right kind!" said Louise. "She hasn't any business to kick that way. She ought to be glad to be milked."

Louise began to laugh.

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"She certainly isn't crazy about it," she answered. "Well, I'm not going to be conquered by one old cow. I'll try what making her mind with lunch will do."

She ran out and snatched a handful of grass, and offered it to Bossy, who took it, but gave the impression that she was accepting it more as a right than as a bribe. She showed no desire to come out of the stall again, and Louise first coaxed and then pulled in vain.

"Use a little switch," suggested Winona.

"I hate to, but moral suasion hasn't had a bit of effect!" said Louise.

She accordingly did use a switch, and Bossy immediately came out.

"Now, we'll try again," said Louise. "All a cow needs is firmness."

She sat down by Bossy, and began to milk once more.

"I thought I remembered how to do it," she said.

The motion did, indeed, seem to be the right one; the cow was quieter, and a little milk began to flow. Then it stopped.

"Oh, there's a limit to all things," said Louise impatiently. "I can't spend my life with this beast."

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But no more milk came. Winona took another turn, and then they both gave up in despair.

“Good-bye, cows, I’m through;
Each cow that I have met
I’ll say good-bye to you
Without the least regret!”

sang Louise, and she suited the action to the word. She put Bossy back for the last time, picked up the pail in one hand and the book in the other, and walked off to her vegetable garden, leaving Winona to follow with the milking-stool.

“Where you been?” demanded small Florence Merriam, meeting her sister and Louise at the chicken-lot, which they had to skirt to get back to the house. The Blue Birds, appropriately, had been detailed to take charge of the chickens—feed them morning and evening. The chickens, by the way, had been wing-clipped, and did not bother the vegetable garden any more. “Been down to see the cows,” said Winona shortly. She did not care about having Florence know all that had passed between her and Bossy. It wasn’t good for discipline.

“Oh—oh! You’ve been trying to milk them! I

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bet you have!" shrilled Florence. "I can see the pail. And I know you didn't get any milk, and I know why!"

"You do, do you?" demanded Louise, who found that firmness was the only way with Florence. "Then you can just tell us why."

"'Cause the boys milked 'em this morning before you went anywhere near them. Then they took them out to pasture—and the fences were broken down, so they had to put them back."

"Been milked already!" said Louise breathlessly. "No wonder we couldn't do anything!"

She looked at Winona and Winona looked at her. Then suddenly the funny side of it all came over them, and they sat down just where they were, on the ground, and laughed and laughed and laughed.

But the worst was yet to come.

"We'll get a lesson in milking this evening, just the same," said Winona, and went to put away the agriculture book and the stool. So they separated to their various tasks for the day, and weeded and hoed and cooked happily, with the milking to look forward to. And at evening there came over two of the Scouts

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who had had experience with cows, and announced that they had been sent to teach the girls to milk, and would volunteers please follow them to the milking place.

Winona and Louise sprang up with alacrity, and went off with the boys to where the cows were.

"This is the gentlest of them," announced Lonny Hughes, leading out Bossy. "She's the best milker, too."

"That's the one we picked as being the gentlest," said Louise proudly. "I think there's a great deal in natural knowledge about things. Now, I always had a sort of gift for cows——"

But Lonny was not paying attention.

"What's the matter with this beast?" he demanded of them and the world in general. "She's all upset."

Dicky Hewlett, the other Scout, looked puzzled.

"She was all right this morning," he said.

"Well, she isn't now," said Lonny firmly. He was Adelaide Hughes' brother, and a very careful, slow, persistent boy. "I can't get a drop of milk from her. Do you suppose those little imps of Blue Birds have been teasing her?"

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"The other cows seem all right—perfectly quiet," said Dicky.

Winona caught her breath.

"Oh, do you suppose it could have been us?" she asked. "We tried to milk her this morning, for quite a while."

"That wouldn't do it," said Dicky, "unless you teased her."

It was Louise's turn to look worried.

"But we did everything we could to make her interested," said she protestingly.

Lonny straightened himself up from bending down by the cow, and looked at Louise.

"Would you mind telling just what your idea of interesting a cow is?" he demanded with severity.

Winona giggled. It did sound funny.

"We tried to milk her," Louise repeated. "Then we fed her grass. Then we switched her a little, because she seemed to want to go back to her stall. Then—then we exercised her a little."

"Exercised her?" demanded Lonny in a very quiet voice. "Just how?"

"Why, we ran her up and down hard," answered Louise.

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There was a hush for a moment. Both boys seemed struck dumb. Then Louise became aware that it was because they couldn't speak. When they could they dropped against the walls and howled with laughter—howled steadily.

"Exercised her!" gasped Lonny when he could. "Oh, sainted cats—exercised a cow by galloping her up and down!"

"Why, isn't that right?" asked Louise in great dismay.

Lonny began to laugh again.

"Well, if you're trying to make a racing cow of her it's all right. But if you want to ruin a cow and stop her milking all you have to do is to gallop her enough. Why—why, Lou, when you're even driving cows to pasture you have to walk them. Did you ever see anybody running a cow? Of course, she won't give any milk—no cow that had been treated that way would."

"Oh!" said Louise. For once in her life she had nothing more to say.

"And you had such a natural gift for cows!" teased Dicky. "You certainly have!"

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"Oh, don't rub it in," begged Winona. "We did make a mess with the cow, but think how we got back the horses. And we didn't hurt the other cows."

"That's it, look on the bright side," said Dicky. "What's a seventy-five-dollar cow between friends?"

"Now, look here," said Louise, "I think it's time you stopped teasing us. Everybody makes mistakes—I heard about how you went to buy pigs, and came back with a razor-back hog that Mr. Gedney had to return the next day. Are these cows' lives ruined, or aren't they? Because if they are I want to get back to the house and help get supper."

"Suppose they aren't?" demanded Dicky.

"Then I want to learn to milk," said Louise practically.

"Be nice and tell us," added Winona coaxingly.

When Winona coaxed she was very pretty, and she was apt to get what she coaxed for.

"Well, this poor old beast won't be all right till to-morrow morning, but I guess she'll straighten out," said Lonny finally, taking pity on the girls. "And if you are sure you didn't monkey with the others——"

"Oh, indeed we didn't!" declared both girls fervently.

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"All right then. We'll start you on Rose," said Lonny mercifully, and led out the cow he spoke of.

He showed Winona how to milk, and after one or two efforts she managed quite well. He agreed with the book about throwing away the first one or two streams of milk. It looked easy enough, but it was hard.

Dicky, meanwhile, took out the other cow, Jenny, and showed Louise.

They were done, finally, and the milk was carried into the cool dairy, so the cream would rise.

"Now when the cream's ready—Mrs. Bryan can tell you about that—you can make butter," said Lonny cheerfully. He forked down some fodder for the cows, and they walked out.

"Make butter—with my arms aching the way they do?" groaned Louise. "Do you mean to tell me that we have to go through the rest of the summer, and look after the vegetables and the chickens, and help you weed and hoe and dig when you want us, with our arms aching like the toothache all the time?"

"After you get the hang of it your arms won't ache," Lonny assured her comfortingly. "Only a day or so."

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"You cheer me," said Louise sarcastically.

"Thank you very much," said Winona rather meekly. She was so tired she didn't care what happened, and she wanted to get Louise back to the house, because *she* was apt to get cross when she was tired, like a man.

She passed her arm through Louise's, and drew her away.

"I wonder how much hot water there is," mused Louise. "I want a hot bath worse than I ever wanted anything in my life."

"So do I," said Winona. "Don't let's try the brook to-night—let's ask for the bathtub."

Louise's brook plan worked very well, but when it was chilly weather the run from the house to the brook was rather an ordeal. Louise's plan of hosing hot water down from the kitchen boiler also worked well, because the boiler, like the kitchen range, was enormous. But it was better for washing than bathing.

"Me for the bathtub," said Louise fervently. "And I'm *so* glad this isn't my housework week!"

"I suppose those wretched boys are laughing at us yet," said Winona.

"I don't think so," said Louise. "The last thing

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they said—I heard them as they went out—was something about fertilizer. They're awfully worried about it."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Louise indifferently. "I'm too dead to care."

But Winona was not too tired to care, and after the hot baths, she put on a clean middy and came down to supper, and asked Mrs. Bryan about it as soon as she got the chance.

"Why are the boys so worried about fertilizer?" she demanded in the first lull.

"It's expensive, and very necessary," Mrs. Bryan replied.

"And can't they get it?"

"Not without paying for it," replied the guardian, smiling a little.

"Everything in this world has to be paid for," sighed Winona.

"It was the pigs that done it," quoted Marie. "I've been going over accounts with them, and they don't know what to do. They bought pigs—pigs are something no farm ought to be without, all the books and farmers say—and the pigs are doing finely,

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and the little ones are going to fetch a lot of money. But they are almost driven to selling them now and buying the fertilizer. The soil needs lime badly, Tom says."

"I thought lime was what you built with," said Florence. "I've seen the men stirring it up where they were building houses."

"It is," began her sister, and then stopped. She was still tired, and explaining to Florence was a long task. One thing led to another so.

"I wonder if lime ever grows in holes in the ground?" asked another of the Blue Birds, Lucy Hillis.

"Why no. What makes you ask?" asked her sister Edith.

"Because Frances and I were out hunting for hidden treasure—not really, you know, just play," Lucy interrupted herself shyly, "and we found a place in the ground where the earth was all different—soft and yellowish and crumbly. Could that be lime?"

The older girl laughed at her.

"Of course it couldn't," said her sister. "Don't be foolish, Lucy."

"Don't be rash, Edith," said Mrs. Bryan. "It might be marl."

CHAPTER NINE

MANAGING ADELAIDE

"MARL?" demanded the girls, pricking up their ears. "What's marl? Is it of any use?"

"It's a splendid top-dressing, and it supplies lime to the soil," said Mrs. Bryan calmly, "so Lucy wasn't so far wrong."

There was a good deal of excitement. The girls rather gobbled their meal, it is to be feared, after that, and made haste to follow Lucy and Frances to the place where they had discovered the strange earth.

"I'm very nearly certain that it is marl," announced Mrs. Bryan, "but it's just as well to be quite sure. Who wants to go down to the farmhouse and ask them to send somebody up who knows?"

Most of the Blue Birds volunteered, and the rest of the Camp Fire stayed where they were, very much excited.

The boys were tired from a long day's work, but nevertheless there were no Scouts missing from the roll

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in the mass that ran up the hill to the field where the discovery had been made.

"Really marl?" they demanded.

"We aren't sure," Mrs. Bryan answered. "We hope so. Two of the little girls found it. It sounds like what I've read marl was like."

Mr. Gedney lowered his lantern to the ground.

"It's a marl-pit, sure enough," he said finally, while all the others waited silently to hear his verdict.

"And does that mean it's good for fertilizer?" demanded everybody.

"It's good for what we happen to want just now—it's very good," he said thankfully. "Wonderful luck. Boys, two of you will have to start digging it tomorrow morning. We haven't any time to lose on it."

The boys were only too glad and thankful, for, as Tom Merriam explained, they were deeply attached to the pigs, and parting with them had cast a gloom over everything.

"Now you won't have to sell them, will you?" demanded Florence, "now we Blue Birds have found marl for you?"

"No, now we won't—and we'll name the best pig

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of the litter for any girl in the Camp Fire you say!" offered Tom generously.

But this kind offer didn't seem to be greeted with great applause.

"If I had an enemy I'd take you up," said Louise, "but I've been so busy since I came out here I haven't had any time for enemies. Let's call the pig Kaiser Bill."

"I wouldn't do that to any pig I ever saw," said Tom warmly. "See here, Louise, those are perfectly good pigs. They never did a thing to anybody."

"And they're going to sell for a lot more than we paid for them," added Billy Lee proudly.

"Poor old things," said Tom. "I wonder what they'll do while we're selling Liberty Bonds."

"Selling Liberty Bonds?" said Mrs. Bryan.

"The Scouts all over are to do it," explained Mr. Gedney.

"Then we'll take care of the farm while you're gone," offered Louise with a rash generosity.

"H'm," said Mr. Gedney doubtfully—by which Louise learned that the story of their milking exploits had been told. "Know how to harness horses, or plow?"

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"No, but we can learn," said Louise calmly.

"You'd better take lessons this week," said Tom "because next week we're going at it. And while I think of it, never exercise pigs. It acts as a reduction cure, and they're better when they're fat."

Louise picked up a convenient seed-potato, and threw it. It was getting dark, so she missed.

"See here, don't waste good seed-potatoes that way," he remonstrated. "If it had hit me it might have spoiled it."

"Time we went, girls," called Mrs. Bryan, and blew the little whistle she carried for the purpose of collecting her flock.

The girls fell into line and marched back to the manor.

They dropped into their accustomed places around the wood fire which the chilly days still made a comfort, and began to talk, all but the squad who were doing dishes.

"Do those boys really mean that about the bonds?" asked Marie rather apprehensively. Marie took responsibilities rather hard, and it looked to her as if some new ones were coming along.

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"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Bryan. "I'm quite sure they do. Well, girls, there really isn't such a great deal for us to do just now. The vegetables and the chickens are the biggest part of it, and the Blue Birds can look after them."

"I hope they won't ruin things," said Louise. "I've been thinking lately that we might take some County Fair prizes with the vegetables, or try, anyway. There are cash prizes. I remember the people talking about it last year when I went to buy eggs."

"The wonder to me is that you ever came back from those egg expeditions at all," commented Helen. "You seem to have heard more things about farming than I knew existed."

"Well, I always believe in improving my mind," said Louise modestly.

"Just what is there to do?" asked Marie.

"It isn't a moment when things are rushing, fortunately," said their guardian. "Corn-hoeing is the principal thing just now. The plowing and planting are over. I believe there are some June peas to pick."

"Oh, then I'll can every last one of them!" said Adelaide thankfully. "When the boys get back there

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won't be a pea left if you girls pick them for me."

"Have we any cans?" demanded Winona.

"No," said Adelaide.

Most of the Camp Fire looked worried.

"Well, we simply *cannot* afford to spend any more money for things," said Louise. "I am beginning to feel like the most mercenary wretch on earth. All I think of is what things cost and if we can afford them. And to think that once I thought money grew on trees!"

"I guess we all of us know more about things costing than we did," said Helen. "Can't we afford any bottles?"

"Bottles?" said Louise alertly.

"I mean cans," said Helen.

But Louise sat very erect.

"No, you don't, you mean bottles. You're a great deal cleverer than you know about. Adelaide, isn't there any way of making things keep in bottles?"

"I suppose wax——" said Adelaide.

"Well, then, why don't we go back to town and get all the old bottles away from our families and friends that they have? If they know that they can

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buy the peas and other things at cost if they do, I should think they'd be glad."

"When do the boys go off to sell the bonds?" asked Mrs. Bryan.

"Not for some days; not till next week, they said," Winona answered.

"Then, please ma'am, Opeechee, can you spare us?" asked Louise. "I'm going bottle-hunting."

"Not to-morrow," said the guardian. "The next day, perfectly well. To-morrow there are strawberries to pick. We have a great deal of preserving ahead of us; I wish the boys had chosen any other time to go."

"They didn't choose it—the Great White Father at Washington did, didn't he?" asked Louise.

"Yes, and we must just make the best of it," said Mrs. Bryan.

"Oh, I love strawberries," sighed Florence sleepily from the floor. "I'm just goin' to pick an' pick an' pick——"

"Opeechee, is there any way of getting the Blue Birds to wear muzzles while they pick?" asked Winona seriously. The Blue Birds thought she meant it, and a universal howl went up.

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"Oh, that isn't fair!"

"I don't want to be muzzled, like a horrid old dog!"

"I won't pick at all if you do that to me!"

"How nicely you all waked up," said Louise serenely.

"Now you're waked up—it's bedtime. And if you all go without yelping I'll try to coax Winona to let you off the muzzles."

"I might, if they went off *very* quietly," said Winona. So they promised with one accord, and Marie marshaled them up to bed in unusual silence.

"I didn't mean to frighten the poor little things so," said Winona. "I ought to have been more literal. But really, I wonder if they'll eat up all the berries."

"We'll have to risk it," said Helen, "if we want to get them all picked in a day. There's a splendid crop. It was nice of the people who ran the farm before to plant such a lot."

"Do we have to can them all?" asked Louise pathetically. "I would like to eat *some!*"

"I think we might allow ourselves enough for supper this time," decided Mrs. Bryan. "This isn't the only time we shall pick them. They'll be ripening right along now, you know."

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So next morning, as soon as the cows were led out to pasture (a rite which Louise always performed very slowly), and the dishes done, the girls went in a body to the strawberry bed. Many hands make light work, and they found that they had all the ripe berries picked in a morning. Adelaide had gone to town to buy sugar, and to collect all the jelly-glasses she could from various homes. Going on the principle that most families can spare two common tumblers, she canvassed the town in Mr. Lane's runabout, loaned her, as usual, for the occasion, and came back with two hundred glasses and the necessary amount of paraffine and paper and string. This is not to say that she asked a hundred families for glasses. Some of them let her have from three to a dozen, and from her own flat she got twenty-four. She took orders, also, for jams for the next winter, as she went—orders at a price that would give the Camp Fire a reasonable profit, and yet cost less than at the stores.

Adelaide was a little worried about herself as she drove about on that sunny June day getting glasses. The spring before they came out she had been in a fair way, young as she was, to make money herself by fill-

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ing orders for home-made jams and jellies. She and her brother and sister had found that by working together after school hours they did not use up so very much time, and got a good deal done—enough to make a start towards college for Lonny, and the same thing for the girls if they wanted it when they were through high school. Of course, when the farm plan came up, their father had consented to their going with their Camp Fire and Scout Patrol. Adelaide had been so busy that it had not occurred to her before that she would lose all this money, working for the common good.

“I’ll just have to go through with it,” she decided. “It isn’t any more than I ought to do—and lots less than a good many people do for the country.”

Still she disliked to tell the wholesale grocers who were her principal customers that there was no hope of her supplying them. That could wait a little while, she thought. So she drove gayly out to the farm, where she was met by a tempestuous crowd of strawberry pickers. They surrounded her little car and took out the glasses and other things for her, and escorted her into the big kitchen.

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"We've picked all the berries in one morning—and heaps and heaps of them, too!" they told her.

"And aren't you too tired to do any jamming this afternoon?" Winona wanted to know. "Don't you want to wait till to-morrow?"

But Adelaide shook her head.

"I've just had a nice ride," she said.

"Who do you want to help you?" asked Mrs. Bryan.

"We'll all help hull. But you won't need so many for the actual preserving."

"Why, I think if I can have Lucy and my sister Frances one big girl besides will be plenty. And I don't really need her," Adelaide answered conscientiously. "But if I do, I'd like Winona."

Adelaide was fond of Winona, as all the girls were—but she had a special reason. When she had first joined the Camp Fire, very lonely and unhappy and a stranger in town, Winona had seen to it that she made friends, and coaxed her out of her feeling that, because she had less money than the other girls, she couldn't go with them.

"Winona?" queried Mrs. Bryan. "I think she

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was going up to learn to curry the horses. She said she thought some of the girls ought to know how in case it was needed. But the horses will keep, I'm sure. Winnie!"

"I'm coming, Opeechee!" called Winona's voice from outside. "Do you know, I'm rather wishing I hadn't wanted to do horses to-day. If I had a good excuse——"

Mrs. Bryan and Adelaide both laughed.

"You have your excuse, fast enough," Mrs. Bryan told her. "Adelaide would like you to help her with the preserving work, if you can?"

"Oh, Adelaide, you angel!" said Winona enthusiastically, flinging herself on Adelaide. "I should think I would! Where's the kettle?"

"Not so fast," said Mrs. Bryan; "we haven't hulled the berries yet."

"But that won't take long," said Winona.

The rest of the girls were already seated around the long trestle table in the dining-room, and they were making the hulls fly.

Adelaide and Winona and Mrs. Bryan followed them in, and for three-quarters of an hour they all

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worked hard. After that some of the girls had to go and attend to the everlasting weeding that filled in all the chinks of their time. There were a dozen heaping milk-pans full of the berries by three-thirty, and Adelaide took what there were and went out to commence operations, taking Winona with her.

"There isn't much to do now but to watch, and take turns stirring," said Adelaide when the berries were on boiling.

"Oh, let me stir!" begged Lucy Hillis, "and skim all that nice scum off the top!"

"And eat it!" added Frances, who as her sister's sister, felt a great responsibility for the jam.

"Why yes, eat it, only don't eat too much or it will make you sick," said Adelaide, and let the two small girls take turns with the long-handled spoon. She knew Frances to be trustworthy as to watching the jam, and turned away to arrange the glasses, while Winona cut circles of paper for their tops.

Neither girl spoke for a few minutes. They were so far away from the younger girls, in the big old kitchen, that they were practically alone. Adelaide went on deftly setting glasses in rows on boards that

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could be lifted up like trays, and put in the pantry to cool when they were full. Presently Winona, without lifting her eyes from her scissors and paper, broke the silence.

"What about your own work, Adelaide?"

"My own work?" Adelaide fenced. "Oh, I don't know. Why, what about it?"

"There's this about it," said Winona straightforwardly, "that you had planned to do a lot of preserving and canning for yourself this year, and had orders ahead. What have you done about it? Please tell me, Adelaide; it's only me, and you know I don't tell what people tell me!"

"I know it," said Adelaide. "It's not a secret, anyway. I suppose I'll have to tell the men I can't."

"And don't you hate to?" asked Winona. Adelaide nodded without speaking.

"Of course, I do. But I don't think I can do anything else."

"It isn't fair," mused Winona.

"There's nothing else to do," Adelaide repeated.

"I think there is!" insisted Winona. "I'm sure the farm work won't take up all your time."

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"I wish I was sure enough of that to go ahead and order the berries, but I'm not. It seems to me as if nothing ever happened in the world except weeding and hoeing. I always thought corn grew of itself, till this year."

"Nothing does—I've found *that* out," said Winona mournfully in her turn. But she made up her mind to see that Adelaide's profitable work wasn't sacrificed. She went on helping her the rest of the afternoon, till the berries were all done, and set in long, steaming rows of glasses in the cool pantry, ready to be sealed up when they had cooled enough. She said nothing more till the supper was over, and the girls in their after-supper relaxation—grouped, this evening on the big porch, for it was warmer, for once, than the chilly days they were so tired of.

Then she sat up in the hammock where she had curled herself, and asked Mrs. Bryan to blow her little whistle, because there was something she wanted to say to the girls.

Adelaide was entirely unprepared for anything of the sort, and so had no chance to stop her.

"Girls, Adelaide isn't going to have any chance to get her own canning done!"

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"Oh, Winona!" protested Adelaide.

"Why, what a shame!" said everybody.

"What do you mean by that?" inquired Marie rather severely.

Winona got entirely out of the hammock and explained.

"She's doing ours, and then there's her share of the farm work."

"Nonsense!" said Marie, who, by reason of training Blue Birds, was becoming rather firm in her dealings with people. "If she hasn't time to do it alone, we can help her. We can just put an extra day on every spell of canning we do for ourselves. Why, it would be very unfair to have anything else happen."

Now Winona had been working up to this very point. If Marie hadn't suggested it, she had been going to suggest it herself, but she was glad Marie had.

"What do you think, Opeechee?" appealed Marie. "Don't you think we could do that?"

"I don't see how you could do anything else!" answered Mrs. Bryan. And that rather settled it.

"What you do, my little friend," said Louise, craning her vivid head around a porch-column so that she

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could fix her eye on Adelaide, "is to trot off and get your cans and your fruit, and leave the rest to darkness and to us, as the school reader says."

"But the strawberries and peas are ripening every other day now, just about, and I don't see how I can spare the time," protested Adelaide, at whom everyone was looking by this time.

"That girl's too fond of being a martyr for any good use," growled Louise, but in too low a tone for Adelaide to hear.

"It's a beautiful sunset," said Helen.

"Lovely day if it didn't rain," rejoined Louise. "I know—you think I oughtn't to free my mind. Well, anyway, I'm glad I'm not a martyr. I'm going to see personally to bullying Adelaide into putting up twice as much fruit for herself as she ever did in her life before."

Helen giggled. It was so like Louise to growl and then do the generous thing, that she couldn't help it.

"All very well," said Louise, "but it's going to happen."

"How are you going to make it?" inquired Helen.

"Take Adelaide to buy the fruit herself," said

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Louise. "I'm like the Third Little Pig. I know where some fine, fat strawberries grow, and I think she can buy them on the vines for less than she could get them from a dealer. Likewise other things. There's an abandoned farm about four miles away that's simply over-run with blackberry vines, and has raspberry bushes, too. More than we need. I think pickings should be havings."

"How on earth do you know where everything is all the time?" demanded Helen, who never looked at places when she was there, except to see that they were picturesque or ugly. How to get to them or go away from them was a minor detail to her.

"I saw it when I went to buy——"

"You saw it when you went to buy eggs," chorused at least six voices behind her, keeping time to Helen's uplifted finger, and Louise, looking behind her, saw that several of the girls in her corner of the porch had been listening to the conversation for the last three minutes, and enjoying it.

"I did see it when I went to buy eggs," said Louise defiantly. "And what's more, I found a hen who had stolen her nest in the abandoned farmyard, and came

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home with a dozen eggs that never cost me a cent."

"Nice eggs?" hinted Winona, "nice young eggs?"

"You never knew them from any of the others," said Louise serenely. "I wonder if I mightn't find an egg or so there now, come to think of it."

"Anyway, Adelaide ought to go to-morrow and buy those berries," said Helen. "She can measure them, and cook them at the same time she does the camp canning."

This brilliant idea was much applauded.

So the next morning, bright and early, Louise saddled Henrietta and rode over to the farm she knew where there were berries on the vines. And she made a very good bargain for the yield. That afternoon she borrowed all the baskets she could get from everyone in sight, and she and Adelaide led a procession up to the bought vines, and picked them clean. The next morning they worked at their own berry patch, and in the afternoon all the berries were made up together. And Adelaide got her preserving done—for they repeated the maneuver all summer. Every time the camp had a canning bee Adelaide laid in her own fruit, and did it along with the general work. And Louise was happy, for Adelaide got no chance for martyrdom.

CHAPTER TEN

THE SECRET PASSAGE

IN spite of the generally cold and rainy weather, the crops did pretty well. The boys made some mistakes, of course, and so did the girls. And the chickens proved to have been insufficiently clipped, and got into the vegetable garden once again, and one of Louise's broilers that she was raising with care with carefully mixed rations out of a chicken book, was eaten by a cat, and another was chased by Puppums, on his only visit to the farm, and never returned from wherever it had run to. The girls went on collecting all the wide-necked bottles and jam-pots and everything else that they could find, and one day awoke to the fact that they had nothing to can—nothing much to do at all.

They could have hired themselves out to the neighbors without any trouble, but Mrs. Bryan advised against it. They had all been working harder than they ever had in their lives before, and there was

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another hard spell of work coming when it began to be harvest time. So for a day or two of the lull they marked time—doing the household routine and the everlasting weeding. Then Louise, the everlastingly active, got restless.

"If something doesn't happen I'm going into the movies," she declared rebelliously. "I had an offer once, you know."

"If you like, you can do all the dairy-work instead of only part of it," offered Lilian Greene generously. "*I'd* be glad enough of a rest!"

"Oh, it isn't work I want! It's excitement!" said Louise frankly. "So far the only thrilling thing that's happened on this old farm up to date has been the night we got James and Henrietta back from the spies."

"How do you know they were spies?" asked Adelaide, who was curled up thankfully on the grass near her. A crowd of the girls were lying about under trees on the wide lawn of the manor-house, being gloriously lazy.

"I don't," said Louise. "I only hope they were. If they were nothing but horse-thieves it wouldn't have been a bit interesting."

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"Nobody ever heard anything more from them, did they?" pursued Adelaide.

"Nobody did. I suppose they are now stealing some other patriotic farm's horses. Oh, I wish something thrilling would happen!"

"Be careful," said Winona. "You know, Louise Lane, when you wish that you're terribly apt to get what you want. Remember how you wanted an adventure, and the four of us, Tom and Billy and you and I, took the car, and found Roger Mendon?"

"Well, wasn't it a good thing we did?" demanded Louise. "Roger needed finding. I wonder what he's doing now. Do you think he went back into the Scouts?"

"I hope nothing happens to him, if he did," said Winona, who had liked Roger, and often worried about him. He was the English boy they had found, ragged and sick, and unable to remember who he was, and had taken care of. It was the thousand dollars his mother had sent the Scouts and the Camp Fire as a reward that had made it possible for them to stock and run the farm.

"Oh, I don't believe it will," said Louise. "You're

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lucky, anyhow, Winnie, and you know you want to go to England when the war's over and visit the Mendons. At least you said you did."

"Nobody knows when that will be," said Winona. "I got a letter from him the other day," she added.

The other girls all looked excited.

"Oh, did you?" they cried, drawing closer. "Why didn't you say anything about it?"

"I—I didn't think anybody would be interested," said Winona. This was true, but it wasn't quite all the truth. Winona was too discreet to say that the reason she did not always speak of Roger's letters was that Billy Lee, her own particular chum, was always gloomy after she had had one, and seemed to feel that he ought to be doing scouting in England, or something more glorious than hoeing potatoes.

She got up and strolled off after a minute or so more of talk. Louise followed her.

"Winnie, you're too easy," said Louise. "You ought to deal with that southern scout named Billy Lee. He hasn't any business to be jealous, no matter how many people you correspond with."

"He isn't jealous," said Winona, a little troubled.

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"It would be silly—as if any of us were grown up enough to take things that way! He just looks mournful. And you can't go at anybody for that!"

"Can't you? Indeed you can! I can, I know," said Louise, whose methods were very straightforward, certainly. "And you ought to. It isn't really quite honest," she went on, using the argument that she knew would appeal most to Winona, "to keep quiet about Roger's letters. We're all interested in him. Promise you'll talk to Billy about it, and get down to a cash basis, so to speak."

"I scarcely ever see him now," objected Winona.

"See him to-night, then, or this afternoon," said Louise, who was relentless once she got started on a thing.

Winona did not very much want to—why, she did not quite know.

Louise took matters into her own hands.

"I'm going to send down to Tom and Billy—you can't mind if your own brother comes along—and tell them we want them for something important this afternoon as soon as dinner is done," said Louise.

"Oh, Lou, don't!" protested Winona weakly, but it did no good.

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"Marie, lend me a Blue Bird," said Louise, calling across to where Marie lay, with the whistle she used to summon the Blue Birds, lying on the grass beside her, where it had slipped out of her blouse.

"With pleasure," said Marie, for the Blue Birds were having almost too much leisure now, and whistled one sharp note. That meant "one messenger needed."

Three came dashing across the grass. Errands were apt to be exciting things; they might even mean riding one of the horses into town for supplies, or being given an afternoon's extra work and sent to a movie afterwards as a reward.

"Only one this time," said Louise. She reached out an indolent arm, and caught the bloomers of the first little girl, who was Lucy Hillis.

"Please go down to the Scouts' house, and tell them that Louise and Winona would like to see Winona's brother, and his friend, as soon as dinner's over, on a very important matter," she said.

Lucy's eyes almost fell out with excitement.

"Is it a discovery about spies?" she asked with a note of awe in her voice. Ever since Louise and Winona, or rather Winona and Louise, had recovered

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the horses, the Blue Birds had been certain that any time they moved a foot they were about to capture spies. Louise did not discourage them. She rather thought those thieves might have been spies, herself.

"Might be spies," said Louise indolently. "Might not. Better not know anything about it till it's all over, Lucy!"

Lucy called Frances Hughes, her own particular friend, and the two scurried down the hill to the Scouts' farmhouse.

Louise laughed.

"There go two excited infants," said she.

"Oh, Lou, you're the worst——" said Winona, half-laughing, half frightened. "When the boys come, what are you going to tell them? What is the important matter?"

"That Billy has to stop having the glooms every time you show any interest in Roger, of course," said Louise.

"Do you mean you're going to tell Tom and Billy that that was all you called them over here for?" demanded Winona, getting up off the grass in haste.

"No," said Louise with calm. "By no means.

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By the time they get over I shall have thought of something very important indeed. You can help me by thinking. You always did have good ideas!"

"Louise Lane!" said Winona, shaken out of her usual sweetness, "there are times when I feel like spanking you!"

"There's no time like the present!" said Louise. "If you want to beat me up—and you find you *can*—go ahead!"

Louise was one of the tallest and strongest of the girls, and an athletic fiend. Winona, though she was nearly as tall, was slenderer, and had not Louise's physical strength. She had been the taller of the two until the winter before, when Louise had suddenly shot up, and from being shorter and much stouter than Winona, was, though still broadly built, no stouter than her height demanded, and five feet seven and a half.

"You know I can't!" said Winona. "I have more endurance, but not your strength. I wouldn't be anywhere, in a roughhouse."

"Little ladies don't roughhouse," said Louise, suddenly springing on the half-risen Winona and pinning

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her down on the grass. Winona, in spite of what she said, was putting up a very good struggle when the dinner bell rang. The first bell gave the girls five minutes to assemble and tidy up for the meal.

The girls lounging about the grass got up and pulled their bloomers straight and their middies down and their collars and ties even, and went to wash their hands. Winona and Louise, roughhouse forgotten, strolled off arm in arm to wash their hands in the brook-house, where towels always hung.

"Look! Our watercress is getting on splendidly!" Winona pointed out.

"It was very clever of you to think of planting it above where the soap would run down," said Louise. "I wonder where the soapy water does run. I hope nobody's cows die of it."

"You *have* a cheerful nature!" said Winona.

"'Course I have!" said Louise, straightening up. "And now, the question is, what are we going to tell the boys the important matter is?"

"You can make it up yourself," said Winona coldly. "You started it."

"All right, you'll have to take the consequences,

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too," said Louise. "I smell ham and eggs. I mean I smell the ham and hope for the eggs."

"They're coming right over!" Lucy and Frances informed the two girls in a breath. "And Tom said to tell you if it wasn't really important this was the last time he'd ever stop making figure-four traps or anything else in the middle of the day——"

"Enough, sweet one," said Louise. "We understand."

"Now you *have* been and gone and done it!" said Winona to Louise triumphantly.

"Well, don't talk to me through dinner, that's all," said Louise. "I'm going to sit and think straight through the ham and all the eggs."

"You'll need to!" said Winona indignantly.

As a matter of fact, Louise never spoke once until the meal was over. Nobody knew what to make of it, for she usually talked all the time she was awake. When she could she drew Winona to one side mysteriously.

"Fear not, little one, we are saved!" she said, striking an attitude.

"What do you mean?" asked Winona. "Have you really thought of something the boys ought to help us do?"

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"I really have," said Louise. "Have you forgotten the hole in the cellar wall, the place that we're almost sure is a secret passage?"

"Louise!" said Winona. "Do you mean that?"

"Why don't I?" demanded Louise. "I'm wild to see what's behind it, and there's no better time than now. We mayn't ever have any warm weather again. It's too hot to be comfortable upstairs. Very well, we'll take to the cellar. I wonder if the boys have anything to dig with?"

The boys came over, quite excited, in a few minutes more; and on being asked excitedly by Louise if they had picks and shovels, replied that they had.

When the girls unfolded the story of the sunken place in the cellar wall, they were quite reconciled to having been dragged away from their figure-four traps. Tom went back to the farmhouse and returned with two picks.

"We're going to fix some bricks in the cellar," Louise explained to such curious friends as they came across. The friends were quite willing, as long as they didn't have to help, and that was all that was necessary.

"You know this is quite as likely to turn out to be

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an old window or the place they used to keep the gas-meter," Tom warned Louise loftily. "We're just doing it to amuse you girls."

"That's all right," said Louise, as coolly as usual. "Go on amusing. Shall I get a basket to put the rubbish in?"

"Go ahead," said Tom, and Louise produced an old peach-basket from under a table in the laundry. It was partly full of clothespins, but she dumped them out.

"Won't the others wonder what we're doing?" inquired Billy, as he leaned forward to look at the sunken oblong of bricks, and decided where to begin.

"Not a bit. We have a very good reputation for industry, and they're sure it's for the common good," said Louise severely.

"Cæsar, if you don't believe in keeping folks in their places!" said Billy. He liked gentler ways in a girl, and the constant sparring between Tom and Louise sometimes surprised him—for it never interfered with their being very good friends.

"People ought to be in their places," said Louise. She grinned disarmingly. "Come on, Billy, don't

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begin a lecture on Southern gentlewomen—wait till we get lost in the secret passage, with only one crust between us, and you can be as chivalrous as you like. I'll even promise to faint!"

"By George, that reminds me! Run along and put up a lunch, Winnie!" said her brother.

"That's silly!" said Louise.

"I don't care," said Tom sturdily, "I never went anywhere with a lunch that I couldn't eat it. Better be on the safe side, that's what *I* say. Go on, kid."

"If she does, will you go on picking till she gets back?" demanded Louise.

"He doesn't have to. I'll do it anyway," said Winona.

The situation was beginning to be a strain. Billy was always polite, but he hadn't spoken a word directly to her since he had come. As a matter of fact, Winona hadn't told Louise the whole story, because she didn't want to blame Billy. But he had lost his ordinarily rather slow-rising temper with her on the occasion of Roger's last letter. She had been very glad to get it, and said so, and praised Roger very highly. And Billy had said that he reckoned she could get along

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without *him* for a chum, as long as she wrote long letters to Roger Mendon, and looked forward to going to spend a summer with his people when the war was over. And Winona had very naturally thought Billy had no business to talk that way, and told him as much. And Winona so seldom said sharp things to people that when she did they took them much harder than they did other people's ordinary crossnesses.

So they had parted with a feeling on both sides that the other ought to make up. And as yet nobody had.

Winona was much more comfortable upstairs in the kitchen, swiftly making the kind of sandwiches Billy liked. She did that as a sort of opening wedge. As she did it she had a dismal feeling that he would never notice it anyway, and give them all to Tom to eat if he did, just to show her how he felt about it.

"Boys are *horrid!*" said Winona, and she meant it.

But the making of sandwiches couldn't be strung out to last forever, and presently she had the luncheon packed, and came back down the cellar with it. It reminded her of so many other times when she had packed a luncheon for the four of them, and gone off to have a very good time.

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"I'll have a good time this time, too!" she thought. "I'm not going to let Billy Lee take all the fun out of things for me!"

She went down, cheerfully swinging her basket.

"How's it coming?" she called.

"Bully!" called back Tom. "Billy and I have decided what it is. It's where they kept the floor-cloths and mops in the Colonial days. We've nearly discovered the mop that brushed up President Washington's cigar-ashes."

Winona came over and looked. The boys were mounted on boxes, and their blows had loosened the mortar around the bricks all the way around. They were now at work on one of the top bricks, and had it almost out. The girls stood still and watched with all their eyes.

"Here she goes!" said Billy, and dropped the brick in the basket.

"Now, the rest will be easy!" said Tom, and attacked more bricks. It wasn't long before they had the whole oblong out.

"Now! Weren't we right?" demanded Louise triumphantly.

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"Don't know yet," said Tom, piling up another box, and pulling a candle out of his pocket. "Better be careful. If it really is anything like what you think the air may be bad. Got a cat anywhere you don't want?"

"What for?" demanded his sister. "There aren't any cats like that. I always want cats."

"The way they do in the trenches, for a gas-tester," said Tom. "Drop pussy in the hole, and if she——"

"You horrid thing!" said Louise.

"Now, hold your horses! If she jumps back and says she doesn't like it, the air's bad. But I can try with a candle."

He lighted his candle and held it at the mouth of the hole.

The candle flickered for a minute, then puffed out.

"May be bad air or a breeze," said Tom. "Got your searchlights, girls?"

They all had.

"Let me get in!" said Louise. "What's there?"

"I can't see," said Tom and Billy almost together. Louise poked her head in.

"The only way to see is to get in," she said.

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Tom held his pocket searchlight inside.

"It's about six and a half feet high," he said.

"The floor of it's about five feet below the hole."

"Let me in!" said Louise.

"Not on your life!" said Tom. "This isn't one of those 'ladies first' parties."

He dropped inside himself before anyone could say any more, and stood, his face about level with the hole, on what he reported was a cement bottom.

"It may be a passage or a little bricked-off extra cellar," he said. "So far the air's all right."

"Any way of getting out?" Billy asked.

"M'hm. Pegs in the wall. See?" He mounted them and crawled through the hole again, putting his legs through first.

"That doesn't look like another cellar!" said Louise.

"Oh, very well, have it your own way. Want to see, Bill?"

Billy dropped through the hole in his turn.

"One of you girls go get a lantern," commanded Tom.

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That looked like business. Louise scurried off for one, and was back in a moment.

"Now we're going in, too," she said. "This is our hole, anyhow. Isn't it, Winnie?"

Winona was a little afraid, but much more excited, and she said it was their hole.

"All right," said Tom resignedly. "It's only wide enough for two abreast. Come on. I tell you it's likely a cellar."

"We'll see," said Louise, and she climbed into the hole, followed by Winona, and Billy, who went last because he thought the girls ought to have someone both before and behind them, in case of accidents.

They marched on, Tom ahead with the lantern, over what looked like a straight passage. The air was good still, though damp, and there was evidently some means of ventilation.

"Now, where's your cellar?" demanded Louise triumphantly.

"What's this?" demanded Winona at almost the same moment. She stooped and picked up a little bundle that lay at one side, close to the wall.

They all stopped to look at it. It was an old,

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very damp little bundle, whose outer covering was what had been a bright, coarse bandanna handkerchief. Winona opened it carefully; the cloth was almost tinder.

Inside was an old corncob pipe, a roll of something that Tom said had been banjo strings, a bright green glass cravat-pin, and an old-fashioned cravat that had been bright blue, but was rotten and dun-colored now except in the creases. There were crumbs that might have been bread once, too.

"How long do you suppose this has been here?" said Louise under her breath. "Since the Revolution?"

Billy took the bundle silently from Winona and looked at it in his turn.

"Not that long in this damp," he said. "It wouldn't be anything but dust. It's a darky's bundle—see the pin and the pipe? And who but a darky would have banjo-strings and a bandanna?"

Winona looked again at the cravat.

"It's the kind they wore long ago," she said thoughtfully. "It's the kind in daguerrotypes. Billy, I know what it is!"

"What?" said Billy. They had both forgotten their quarrel.

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"This was one of those places that were built all over the Northern States, wherever there were Quakers, to get runaway slaves to Canada! This is some poor old slave's bundle that he dropped in the sixties or fifties. And he's never had his bundle!"

Somehow it seemed heartbreaking, the poor old relics, found so long afterwards.

"He doesn't want it, now," said Billy softly. "I reckon you're right, Winnie," he added in a quicker tone. "I've seen passages like this—there's one I know in a Philadelphia graveyard. They generally run down to the river, or a railroad, or some means of getting away. Now we know what this is, shall we go back?"

"Not on your life!" said Tom, and "goodness no!" said Louise.

"It's nearly time for eats," added Tom. "If Sambo lost his cornpone in the sixties, no reason why we should lose ours now."

They moved on a little further, and, sitting on the floor of the passage two and two, facing each other, they ate up all the sandwiches and cake, and drank some of the grape juice Winona had in her basket.

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There was still a loaf of nut bread left, and a bottle of grape juice and water, and Winona put those back. They went on after that.

“ See here! This isn’t Civil War days!” said Billy suddenly.

They had come to a place where there was a quite new passage leading down into their old one, a passage that had not been dug long.

“ Somebody’s broken into our passage for reasons of their own, and I vote we find what they wanted!” said Tom.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WHAT THEY WANTED

"SHALL we all go?" asked his sister.

"No, don't bother," said Tom. "It can't be far. I'll just go see."

He accordingly walked around the curve of the new passage, which was not cemented, merely shored up with wood, and was lost to sight for a few minutes. Presently he came back.

"Where does it lead to?" demanded the other three in one breath.

"One of our wheat fields!" Tom answered in a disgusted voice. "Whoever the brutes are they've trampled the wheat as if they didn't care what happened."

"Could it be some of the Scouts?" asked Winona.

"No, it couldn't," said Tom, and Billy agreed with him. "They wouldn't ruin the wheat in that careless way. Besides, none of the boys have had the time it would take to do a thing like this. There are days and days of work on it."

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"That answer applies to the girls, too," said Winona thoughtfully. "That settles it. Whoever they were they were outsiders who wanted to get into our tunnel."

"What for?" demanded Louise.

"Not to get to the house, that's sure, or we'd have heard something," said Winona. "You know we've been doing things down cellar right along, up to three days ago."

"We mightn't have heard," said Louise.

"I noticed the condition of the walls and floor as we went along," said Billy. "Nobody had passed for a good many years. No, our friends had business at the other end."

"Then let's have business at the other end ourselves!" proposed Louise cheerfully.

"See here, you girls had better go back," said Tom uneasily. "We might come across something nasty. They may be just having an exciting time digging into tunnels, or they may have some unpleasant reason. Go on back, that's good girls."

"No indeed!" said Louise. "I'm as good as a boy any day."

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"It's three or so in the afternoon," Winona reminded them. "If the tunnellers are bad they wouldn't be here by day. They'd run a risk of you boys seeing them in the wheat. I think we're safe—let's go on ahead."

She picked up the lantern Billy had set on the ground, and started off resolutely.

Louise followed her, and there was nothing for the boys to do but follow them, which they did. The passage went on a few hundred yards more very uneventfully, though Billy said there were traces of recent occupancy. And then, just as the tunnel was about to lead towards the river, came another new passage, at right angles, nearly to the old one.

"Now we'll find out what they did it for!" said Louise triumphantly, and stepped into it.

The others followed. It was not as high or as well-dug as the other, or as well-ventilated. But it was crawlable, and Louise crawled.

It ended in a place which looked as if it had been hastily covered up with boards. She pushed the boards.

"Here, go gently," said Billy, and took her place.

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He pushed harder, and the boards went inwards. He stuck a foot after them.

"Why, it's got a pile of boxes on the other side," he said. He lowered both legs, and kicked them away a little space, and let himself down behind them. The others followed, and pushed them off entirely, standing behind them. They were evidently in another cellar.

"Here, what's all that noise?" said a voice, and they could hear men's footsteps coming toward them.

They pushed the high pile of boxes, with a concerted effort, further out, and walked out from behind it almost into the arms of a couple of men in overalls.

"What are you kids doing here?" demanded the foremost man.

"We'd like to know ourselves," said Billy. "We're farming up at the old Manor farm—we're Scouts and Camp Fire Girls—and we found an old passage in our cellar that we think was a part of the slave-days underground railroad. But somebody's dug a fresh passage from our wheat field into it, and this part's fresh, too, into your cellar. So we explored."

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Billy was very dusty and streaked with dirt, as were the other three, but he took off his cap, and smiled at them politely. Billy's manners were always to be trusted in an emergency.

"You explored, hey?" said the man, but softening a little. "Come here, Jim. These kids say they got into this cellar by a tunnel somebody's dug. Know where you are?"

"About a mile and a half away from the farm, in some cellar," said Billy.

"You're in the cellar of the De Mar Powder Works, that's where you are!" said the man. "And it's the only way you could have got there, too, because there's Federal guards all over the outside. I guess you're all right, but you'll have to explain to the foreman. Come on upstairs."

"Before you go upstairs I think you ought to go back in that tunnel," said Winona firmly. "I don't want to be silly, but it looks to me like somebody trying to blow you up, and you'd better go look for bombs."

"You sound like a melodrama, Win!" said her brother, though he was excited, too.

"People do melodrama things in war-time, and they

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have blown up powder factories. I've read it in the paper," said Winona. "I'd rather be silly than sorry afterwards."

"You're right, kid, they do," said the other man. "I'll go back right now. You hold onto these kids, Clarence."

The "kids" stayed where they were, though the boys were wild to go back and investigate, till Jim came back from the hole. He was very dusty.

"Didn't find a thing," he said. "But I think we'd better watch."

They took the four upstairs to the foreman, to whom they told their story over again.

He called up the farm, got Mr. Gedney by a lucky chance, and was reassured that the girls and boys really were *bona fide* Scouts and Camp Fire Girls. Mr. Gedney offered to come over, and they requested him to come by way of the passage, which he promised to do. Meanwhile the boys and girls were taken to the general manager's office, and a great deal of fuss made over them.

"It would have been more exciting if we had really discovered bombs," said Louise wistfully.

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Meanwhile the manager gave orders that a guard should be set in the wheat-field, and another inside the tunnel, as soon as Mr. Gedney was through. He dropped in in about half an hour, also very dusty. He said that he had had trouble in keeping the camp from following him *en masse*, and that nothing but the fact that he hadn't told about the tunnel prevented it from swarming with Scouts.

"We'd rather you didn't mention it to any more people," said the manager. "It looks very much like the doings of some of our alien friends, and we don't want to say anything till we've nabbed them."

They all promised to say nothing whatever, and were presently sent home in the manager's car, with fervent thanks.

"How I do wish we could have waited around till something happened!" lamented Louise.

"You might have been very sorry," hinted Winona. "Don't you remember that lovely poem:

With a stick of dynamite
Willie shocked his sister quite—
One arm lit in Conshohocken,
One in Darby—oh, how shockin'!

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Camden claimed another chunk,
Some was found in Manayunk.
"Gee," said Willie with a sigh,
"What a lovely way to die!"

"Not a bad way at all," said Louise undauntedly.
"I'd have risked it."

They got back and were surrounded by practically every boy and girl on the farm, all eager to know what had gone on, and how they had gone away without being seen.

"We can't tell," said Louise grandly. "You will know soon, my children."

"I know!" piped up Lucy Hillis. "It has something to do with spies!"

"You don't know anything about it," said Louise hastily. "At least, please don't. We all will soon."

"It's going to be hard to go back to hoeing with that hanging over us," said Tom under his breath.

Meanwhile Billy was talking to Winona, in a corner of the porch.

"Winnie, I'm sorry I was such a grouch about Roger," he said. "I don't know what came over me."

"I was cross, too," said Winona frankly, "and I

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won't be any more. And if you like I'll never talk about him again."

Billy laughed.

"That would be worse yet," he said. "No indeed. I don't know what ailed me to act that way. Roger's a good old scout, and I'm going to talk about him myself all I want to. And I hope you will, too."

"I don't know why I should seem to you to want to spend all my time talking about Roger!" said Winona, laughing at him. "I'd rather talk about Billy once in a while."

"You may," said Billy, laughing, too. "Then the hatchet's buried, Win?"

"Oh, yes," said Winona, "and you don't know how glad I am! I did so hate to be out with you!"

"So did I," said Billy.

"Come on, boys—it's almost supper-time," called Mr. Gedney, and Billy had to go.

"Well, are you and Bill friends?" demanded Louise, coming over to the corner where Winona still stood.

"Yes, it's all right," said Winona.

"Well, it took a secret passage and a spy hunt to do it, but I think it was worth it!" said Louise.

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"So do I," said Winona thankfully. "Lou, you're a good friend to have."

They waited two days before they heard any more from the manager of the powder factory. Then he called Mr. Gedney up, and informed him placidly that he had caught two men in the Scout's wheat-field, which they had carefully avoided by orders, and that one of the men had with him what was beyond question a tin-can bomb, and that the other had been about to set fire to the field, by his own confession, as soon as its usefulness for concealment was over.

"So you saved the wheat as well as the powder factory," said Mr. Gedney to the four.

"Do you think the powder people will give us anything for the farm as a reward?" demanded Louise.

"You greedy thing!" said Winona.

"I'm afraid he's planning something more personal," said Mr. Gedney.

"Oh, then it had better be for the farm. Tell him that a lot of glass jars for canning would help a lot," said Winona eagerly. "We don't want anything, but if he really wants to we *do* need glass jars!"

"Why, I thought you'd canned up everything in sight," said the Scoutmaster.

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"We have, but Marie saw something in a New York paper that gave us an idea," explained Winona. "We think we can get more stuff to can, almost free."

"What's the new plan?" inquired Mr. Gedney, smiling. "You have so many you dazzle me."

"To rescue poor hurt vegetables, and preserve them," said Winona. "We think we can get Louise's father's car again, maybe."

"Do as much as you can of it as quickly as possible," Mr. Gedney warned them. "Next month crops will be ripening, and we're going to want all the field labor we can get."

So Winona told Louise that he said they would have to hurry, and on the strength of that got Louise's father's promise that they could have the car every day for a week. Their next move was to secure the boys, plus Adelaide and her brother Lonny. The boys were glad enough to be secured. A little motoring trip to New York every day would be a pleasant change, they said, from farm work.

It was a seven-passenger car. The first day they all went up in it. Their plan was to go to the docks where vegetables were unloaded, and bargain for

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bruised, but fairly good, fruit and vegetables that would otherwise have been thrown away, and take them home to sort over and can. The paper had said that some society women in New York were doing it, and they didn't see why there weren't docks enough and fruit and vegetables enough for them, too.

They drove through the city without any trouble, though they had a little wait at the ferry. The boys' Scout uniforms ensured all the consideration they could ask for, and they found that the policemen favored them when they could.

The boys knew within a few blocks of where the docks were, and the ever friendly policemen directed them more closely. At the first dock they came to they found the women of the newspaper story were there already, four rather worried-looking but capable women, directing a crew of sorters that was partly poor women and partly Scouts.

"Oh, have they sent you to help us? What a blessing!" said one of the directing women. "We were short-handed."

"I'm afraid not," said Billy, courteously taking off his hat. "We are from a farm that is being run by

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Scouts and Camp Fire Girls, and we're looking for a dock where we can get vegetables to can, ourselves."

"Well, it's a good thing to get as much out of the wreck as you can," she said. "It's a sin and a shame the way this good food is being wasted, and there's enough for everybody."

"If we went to another dock could we find some?" Winona asked, bending forward from her seat.

"We have tried to station people at all the docks, but there's not enough at any," the directress answered.

"If I could be certain that you were responsible I would concentrate more workers on the other stations, and leave one clear field to you."

Mrs. Bryan had thought of this, and had provided the girls with a letter stating that they represented Camp Karonya, and were authorized to buy vegetables for canning. The boys' uniforms were, as always, guarantee enough for them. The directress looked over the letter, and said that it was satisfactory. Lonny and Tom volunteered to get out and help the workers at this place while the others drove the directress over to the place she was willing to allot to them. She

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got into the car, and showed them where the other place was.

The men who were delivering the vegetables and fruit from the cars were, indeed, flinging out what seemed a criminal amount of badly packed fruit. The consignment on the dock she left to them was car after car of oranges, and it occurred to them that it was a good thing that this was so. They had vegetables of their own, and small fruits were to be had for the picking near by their farm; in a few days the blackberries would be ripe, and they had already done a good deal to the huckleberries. But there was no way of getting oranges, and Adelaide had particularly wanted to make marmalade, both for herself and for the families of the girls.

So they all sorted diligently the whole day through, and at five o'clock Louise and Tom went back in the car. So did a carful of oranges. The others took the train to their own homes, because it was shorter to do that, and be called for in the car next day, than to go back to the farm, which was not very near train service. They did it again next day, and the next. keep-

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ing it up steadily for a week, and then going every other day the next week.

The powder works people did show their gratitude, helped by a suggestion from Mr. Gedney, by a present of cans, rubbers and everything that a canner's heart could wish. So the Karonya girls pitched in, and had to show for their industry shelves and shelves of marmalade, and so much sauer-kraut that nobody knew what could be done with it. The sauer-kraut was necessary because the freight-cars had seemed to run more to cabbages than to anything else.

After that the nearby orchards began to demand attention. Apples were ripening, and pears. There were abandoned farms within a driving radius that had bearing trees, and the girls canned and dried apples and pears and, presently, peaches, till, as Louise said, they began to feel like a canning factory. When the cans gave out, as they did, with twelve girls steadily engaged on orchards full of fruit, they looked up the directions in the government bulletins and made and used drying-trays, packing the dried fruits away for winter use. They even got to the point of drying potatoes, and Adelaide, who had done so much of the

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work that she was beginning to add fancy touches, put up dried vegetable soup rations, after she had tried them out on the girls and found they worked very well.

The broilers, who had patriotically been hatched on Memorial Day, had approached broiling size, and were being disposed of at an excellent profit which still was much below market price, to various families in the town. The little pigs were growing up, fine and fat, and promised to sell at a good profit. The cows were doing so well that it broke the girls' hearts to think of selling them. And they disliked the idea of having their people pay thirteen and fourteen cents a quart for milk all winter. The girls had learned to milk, and to make butter and cheese, and they wanted to keep the cows.

"Perhaps we could come out and look after them, have house-parties, sort of, all winter," suggested one of the girls hopefully. "But that didn't seem very easy to arrange. The cows would need heat, at least a little, and attention morning and night, and none of the girls' parents were very apt to be willing for their daughters to sacrifice schooling to a few cents less on the milk bill.

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Finally Mrs. Gary, their old friend of the truck farm, came to their rescue. She said that if the boys and girls could manage among them to give her two hours a day of help all winter, which, as there were twenty-four of the boys and twelve of the girls, did not seem a hard proposition, she would take care of the cows for them.

That meant that the milk-bills for the families of the Scouts and Camp Fire Girls would be much less. But when various of the girls went in for week-ends and told their mothers about it, other families coaxed to be allowed to buy milk, too. The end of the affair was that the Mayor and council of the town voted to have a municipal milk-station, to be paid for out of town funds, and deliver the milk at the lower price. So Bossy, Royal Rose, and Jenny, whom the girls had gotten really attached to by the end of the summer, would not have to be parted with. The town would buy them, to be sure, but they would be still within reach, and the Mayor told Mr. Gedney that if they took on the farm again next year he would sell them again for just what he paid for them, on condition that the camps kept on supplying the town with milk.

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The embargo had been taken off the secret passage now, and it stood open for all the boys and girls to see. In another day the Scouts intended to wall it up, because the powder people, though they said they had the utmost possible trust in the Camp Fire, were a little uneasy as to what might happen when they were gone.

The school year was to be a half month later this fall. The authorities said that they didn't think it was fair to the girls and boys who had been doing hard work for the country, that the others should be given two weeks' extra work, and they have to make it up. So by starting even everything was arranged.

"And now, I suppose," said Winona, looking down from a ladder where she was helping store boxes upon boxes of dried fruit, "we'll have to go out and reap, or glean, or something."

Mrs. Bryan, who was helping her, laughed.

"Dear child, you don't think that these are Bible times, do you? The boys have exchanged enough labor with the farmer three miles south of us, to have the use of his reaper and binder. They say it will be a very good crop. And Mr. Gedney has arranged for the sale of it to the wheat people. You can go out and

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watch James and Henrietta doing the reaping and binding and gleaning, or whatever it is you feel you ought to do. Some of you may be needed to drive the binder, but that'll be all that's necessary."

"There'll be one last orgie of canning with the grapes," Adelaide put in. "When we're through that you'll be glad enough to rest, Winnie!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE MANOR FOR THE COUNTRY

"I KEEP thinking of that chorus from Elijah, that the choir sang," said Marie thoughtfully,

The harvest now is over, the summer days are done,
And yet no power cometh to help us!

"I don't see why you say that!" said Winona. "I think we've been helped pretty much. We've paid expenses almost straight through, sometimes a lot more than paid; and look at all the things we've canned and dried for the winter! And the boys say that they are going to get splendid prices for the corn and rye."

"And the wheat?"

"Yes, for the wheat, too—only the wheat crop isn't as good as the others."

It was a glorious autumn day; the sojourn at the farm was nearly over. The girls were out with baskets, chestnutting. It wasn't work—there was no particular purpose that chestnuts served, except being roasted and eaten. They were just enjoying life.

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Winona sat down under a tree with her basket, and Marie dropped down by her.

"I know one thing," said Marie, "spending my summer keeping all the little girls at work was the hardest thing I ever did in my life. I felt like a slave-driver sometimes."

"You talk like one," said Winona, "whereas they really didn't do any more than ever they do in the summer-time; only their work was directed instead of being just things that didn't get them anywhere. I feel worse about James and Henrietta."

"Why? They're happy too," said Marie.

"I know, but they're thinner. Poor things, they were so fat and shiny when they came, and now they aren't a bit!"

"Winona!" said Marie. "Do you mean to say you didn't know they were too fat? Mr. Gedney says we've done them a world of good—that they had indigestion or something when they came, and that the work simply made new horses of them!"

"No!" said Winona. "I certainly am glad to hear it!"

"The ones to feel sorry for are the hens," sug-

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gested Louise, strolling up with her basket, and mechanically stooping to pull down the overalls that weren't there—this being a party more or less, and overalls having been left at home. "They are not new hens at all. What aren't chicken pie by now will be to-morrow."

"All of them?" asked Winona, pouring her chestnuts out into her lap, and sorting them over as she talked.

"N—no, not the laying kind. But all the broilers are gone or engaged, and they brought very good prices."

"Because I *thought* we'd agreed to share up the hens, the ones of us that had places to put them."

"So we did. And so we are," said Louise, whose especial pride and joy the hens were. "But all my broilers are disposed of. We lost very few, comparatively. I want to go into the chicken business."

"What about the movies?" demanded Helen.

"You'll never get over that one lone offer I got," said Louise. "I have a year yet of school, anyway, before anything else happens to me."

"I want college pretty badly," said Marie, "but

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with things costing the way they do just now it doesn't look as if I was going to get the chance."

"You never know," said Winona.

Helen looked out through the trees at the lovely autumn landscape—woods sweeping on beyond the meadows, and the river glinting in the distance.

"I want to go on studying art," she said. "Do you know, girls, I've done a good deal of drawing this summer, in spite of raking hay and hoeing the eternal vegetables. Queer!"

"What do you want to do, Winnie?" asked Marie. "We've all said but you."

Winona looked down at her lap.

"You'll laugh if I tell you," she answered. "It sounds silly—like the little girls. I want to go to war."

"You don't mean fight?" demanded Louise.

"And cut off your hair and wear uniform, like those Russian girls?" demanded Edith Hillis, coming up and standing by the others.

Winona shook her yellow-brown curls vigorously.

"No, of course not. A girl as young as I couldn't do that, even if people were doing it over here. Thank goodness, our men don't have to be shamed into doing

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their duty. But with everything going on the way it is, and the regulars over there, and the National Guard on its way, and war going on—I want to go, too.”

“So do I,” confessed Louise. “I’m like the Blue Birds—do you remember how they tried to train Puppums to be a Red Cross dog, and take ropes to prisoners, this winter—and how they stole father’s car and went off to the front in it, and got eight miles away?”

“Shall I ever forget it?” said Winona. “All of us were nearly wild.”

“We’ve been doing war work all summer,” Helen reminded them.

“I know it, and I think we’ve helped,” said Winona. “But it seems far off. Raising food to be cooked and eaten, to save other food for the Allies—it’s pretty distant.”

“It isn’t distant a bit,” said Edith warmly. “I can tell you nothing but remembering it *was* for the country would ever have made me work the way I have this summer. Doing pageant work last winter was hard work, but it was clean, anyway, and now—just *look* at my hands!”

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She held out two little slim paws that were scratched and browned, and whose nails were broken.

"I'm not sorry, and I suppose they'll come right," said she. "And my complexion will never look the same."

She laughed a little as she spoke, but she sighed, too. Edith's doll-like prettiness was not the kind that is improved by wind and weather, and she had never in her life let herself get very tanned before.

"Do you care?" asked Louise. "I don't, and I have so many freckles that there's nothing else to me. We're all of us stronger and better—the thin girls are fatter and the fat ones thinner, as witness me."

She held out a beautifully modelled, strong, brown arm to them.

"I believe with one more summer of this, I could do a man's work and get his wages," she said.

The other girls did not deny it. Louise was the strongest of any of them.

"Well, we've all worked hard," said Winona. "But it's been fun. Adelaide did about as much as any of us."

"Adelaide made the money she expected to, too,"

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added Marie. "I'm glad of that. Where is Adelaide, anyway?" she went on idly. "I thought she was coming chestnutting with us."

"I thought so, too. Maybe she's gone off with the Blue Birds. They had something on foot, and perhaps they coaxed her to go with them," suggested Winona lazily. "Oh, isn't the sunshine nice?"

"It certainly is," agreed Helen. Louise, more restless, was still walking to and fro.

"It's all right now, but there were times, digging potatoes, when I'd just as leave there hadn't been any," said Edith.

"There were more times when it rained," said Louise reminiscently. "We've certainly had weather!"

"We've certainly had fun, too!" said Winona, "Remember the corn-popping parties, and the secret passage! Oh, how I shall hate to go off and leave that secret passage by itself!"

Just then they heard the patter of feet over the leaves, and Adelaide came flying up, hatless. For once her thin, pale face was flushed, and she was excited and laughing.

"Oh, girls, have you heard the news?" she demanded.

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"What news?" said everybody. "Is the war over?"

Adelaide laughed, as she dropped on a heap of leaves and began fanning herself with a quite unnecessary hat.

"No indeed—we may have to go on feeding the Allies another year!" she said. "And I wouldn't mind, if we could do it here."

"Then what is it? Have the Dutch taken Holland?" inquired Louise, rather sarcastically. "It must be something or other nearly as exciting, judging by the way you flew up. Where have you been?"

"Out with my brother Lonny," said she. "Lonny wanted me to come over and sew up a particularly bad hole he'd torn in his overalls; so I did. And while I was sitting on the steps of the farmhouse doing it, and hoping that the other Scouts wouldn't come along and want a lot of other things sewed—you know how they do——"

The girls nodded. They knew exactly how they did. The year before, when they had had a camp a little way from the Scouts' camp, they had charged for doing mending; but this year, when they were all

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in partnership, it hadn't seemed exactly a fair thing to do. So they had done it for nothing. And there had been about twice as much, because the boys were doing farm work all day long, and naturally got holes and tears in everything they wore. It was an off day when there wasn't an hour or so of mending for from one to three of the girls.

"Well, I'd nearly finished the hole," Adelaide went on, "and there hadn't a single other Scout turned up with overalls or shirts or anything that he wanted sewed, and I was beginning to think I'd get off to come down and do chestnutting after all. And then Mr. Gedney turned up."

"Did he ask you to mend his clothes? He has a perfectly good wife of his own, and I don't think much of that, if it's your news," said Marie placidly.

"No! Do have patience!" said Adelaide. "He had somebody with him—and who do you think?"

"Teddy Roosevelt, come to make a speech about us," answered Winona irreverently. "I think we deserved it, don't you?"

"It was the man who owns the house!" said Adelaide. The girls sat up at this.

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"Good gracious! And what did he say?" asked everybody, while they began to have visions of the things they had done to the long-suffering old manor. He mightn't approve of the jelly shelves they had had to put up in the kitchen and cellar. And how would he like the hole they had made when they dug out the bricks that led to the old underground passage? And then the nails where they had put up masterpieces from the ten cent store——?

"Do you think he'll mind what we've done?" three of the five girls under the trees asked in a breath, and then laughed at themselves.

"I couldn't hear everything he was saying," reported Adelaide, "but he did like what we've done. He said we deserved commendation, and he said that he was thinking of making over to us, something—he went inside the house, then."

"Just the time when you ought to have heard!" lamented Winona. "Well, anyway, he's not angry."

They were going on to discuss it further, when the sound of Mrs. Bryan's clear, penetrating little whistle was heard from the house; the signal for all the girls to assemble blown upon it.

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As the girls sprang up they heard it echoed by the Scouts' bugle, the assembly call.

"Grand review! Oh, it *must* be something splendid!" cried Winona, and the girls ran towards the sound.

The parade ground was the smooth, wide lawn before the old house; a lawn that in its day had been beautiful, and was still spacious, though the girls had lopped off a big vegetable garden.

Most of the other girls were there before them. They had time to fall into rank, two lines of them, with the Blue Birds in a third line in front, parallel with the three Scout patrols. They stood still and steadily, in their Camp Fire uniform of red, white, and blue, as trim and soldier-like as the khaki-clad boys.

Facing them on the lawn stood Mr. Gedney, the Scoutmaster, Mrs. Bryan, their guardian, and a man they did not know, but whom they knew must be the owner of the old manor-house and farm which had enabled them to raise grain and fruit and vegetables for the country all summer.

"Girls and boys," said Mr. Gedney, "this is Mr. Firkins, who owns the house and farm where we have been living all summer."

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"Three cheers for Mr. Firkins!" proposed one of the Scouts, and they were given with a will.

Mr. Firkins, who was a stout, red-faced man with a kindly expression, and the air at the same time, of a man of business, seemed very much pleased at being cheered. After they were through Mr. Gedney went on talking.

"Mr. Firkins has asked me to say for him that he is so much pleased at the way you have managed the farm, and harvested the crops, that he feels he ought to do something more than let you go on having it. He proposes to pay for its heating and lighting all winter, and let you use it for a joint club-house; each to have a part of it that you shall prefer, half for the Scouts and half for the Camp Fire Girls. He is sure that you will find ways to continue to make use of it for the country."

"How perfectly splendid!" whispered Winona to Louise, next her in rank. "But how are we going to get out here?"

As if in answer to her, Mr. Gedney went on: "There is to be an extension of the trolley line which will enable you to ride over to it from the village. So it

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remains for you only to plan what use you shall make of it for the country. This is understood in the gift—is it not, Mr. Firkins?”

“I don’t think I need to make it understood,” said Mr. Firkins heartily. “They’ve done so well already that I scarcely need to ask them whether they’ll go on doing good. I leave it to them what use they’ll make, and I’ll stand back of anything they choose to do.”

Mrs. Bryan spoke to him in a low voice—the girls learned afterwards that she was inviting him to supper—and then the order to break ranks was given. Those girls whose turn it was to get the next meal hastened into the house, followed by others, who wanted to be sure that by the time Mr. Firkins was ushered in it would be tidy enough to make him not repent of what he was doing. They lighted the fires laid in the big fireplaces, arranged the furniture as homelike as they could, and hurried out for big bunches of goldenrod and asters to bank on the mantelpiece.

When he came in he seemed delighted.

“We none of us could ever feel at home in this old barracks,” he declared. “My wife always said she was sure the ghosts of those old Colonials that owned

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it first didn't like us, and wanted us to go. She's fanciful that way. But the ghosts don't seem to have bothered you girls any."

"That's because we haven't had time to bother with them," Winona answered for the girls, laughingly. "It would be a very hard-working ghost that would wake me up after I'd been out hoeing vegetables all day!"

"Hoeing vegetables, eh? And what happened to the vegetables?"

"Oh, do come and see!" Adelaide begged him. "Dinner isn't anywhere near ready yet!"

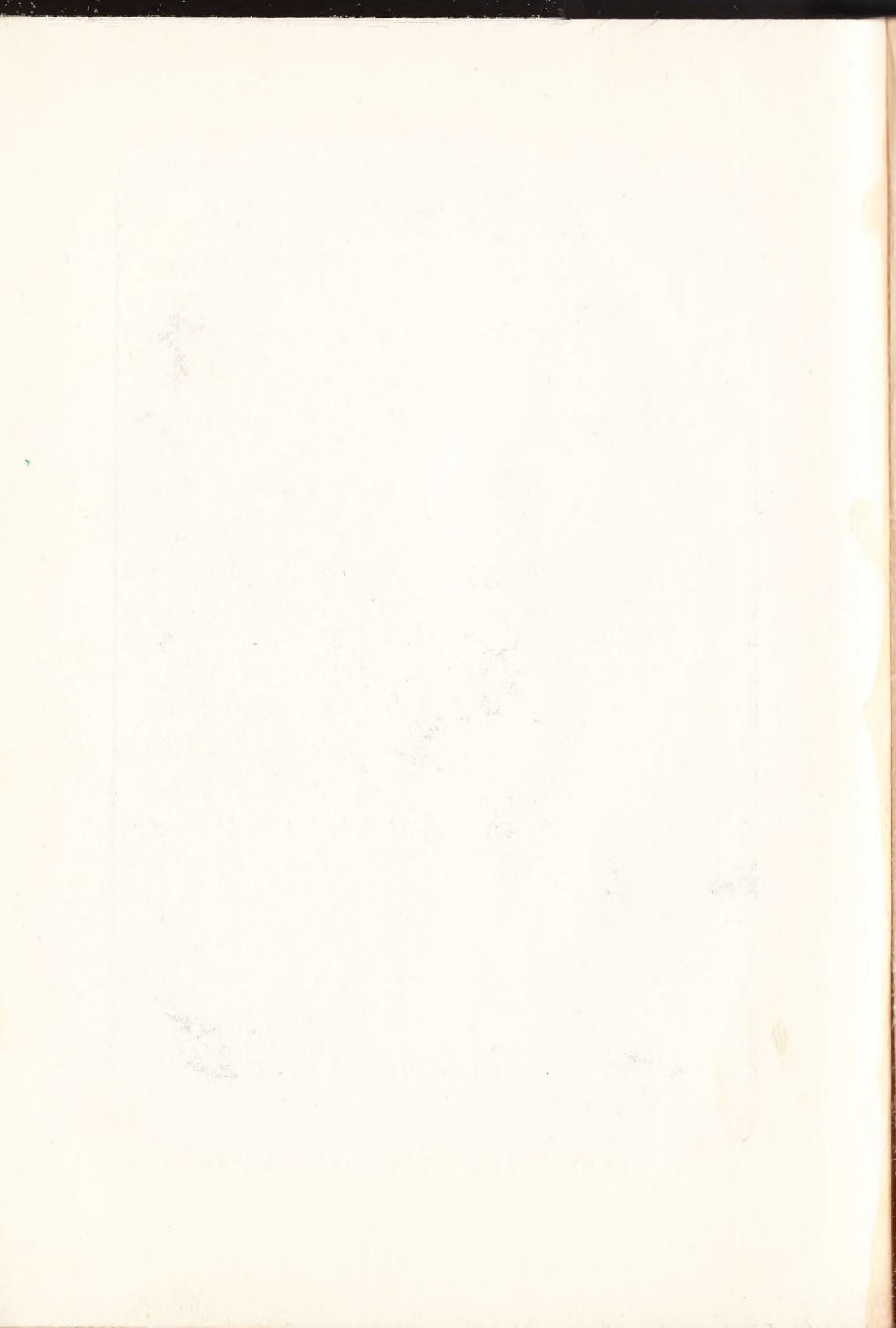
So, with a bevy of eager girls around him, Mr. Firkins was shown into the kitchen. They pointed out to him the rows upon rows of canned vegetables; the piles of boxes full of dried ones; the other rows and rows of jellies, of jams, of preserved fruits.

"We've canned the whole orchard!" Louise told him proudly. "Peaches and pears and cherries and apples and all! And oh, girls, I think he ought to have some of his own fruit to carry home—don't you?"

She turned around on their benefactor. "Did you come in an automobile? If you did you can take a lot, and you must!"



SHE PICKED UP A MARKET BASKET AND WENT FROM SHELF TO SHELF



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"Yes, you must!" said the other girls.

"Well, not more than samples," begged Mr. Firkins. They laughed.

"Samples of everything would be a large order," said Winona. She picked up a big market-basket, and went from shelf to shelf, selecting for him one jar of every kind of jam, every kind of jelly, pickle, preserve, and even a box of the dried vegetable soup ration which they had invented.

"What's this?" he asked, lifting the lid of the box and looking in with interest.

"That's vegetable soup!" they answered him in chorus.

Then Adelaide, who had been the principal inventor, explained.

"It's all the vegetables that go to make soup, put together with salt and pepper. See, it's marked on the box—'Soup for Six People.' We expect to either divide it around our families this winter, or sell it. If we can we'll sell it, as we do everything, at a lower price than people have to pay elsewhere. We expect to make quite a lot of money for the Red Cross that way."

WINONA'S WAR FARM

"It looks very dry!" said he. "But I suppose it's very fine soup when it's made. I'm not much of a cook myself."

"You're going to have some of it at dinner," they told him. "We hope you'll like it. Everything on the table was grown on the farm, milk and butter and chickens and vegetables. There's the dinner bell."

"And time it was, too!" said Mr. Firkins. "You make me hungry talking about all these good things."

The dinner was, as they had said, almost entirely of the farm products. The boys had been invited, too, and naturally double the usual quantity of food provided. But the girls had become so expert at cooking in large quantities that the food had as much of an individual, home-cooked taste, Mr. Firkins said, as if it had been cooked for him alone.

He went away, after dinner, with the basketful of goodies piled in the floor of his car, still very much pleased with what he had seen.

"Well, thank goodness we did all right!" sighed Louise. "I was in mortal terror of his asking about the hole we made in the bricks."

"Oh, that's all right!" Tom assured her. "Mr.

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Gedney told him all about that. But he made it sound so noble I scarcely knew the story when I heard it. It sounded as if we'd rescued the nation single-handed."

"Then he didn't mind the hole?" sighed Louise happily, whose notion the hole had originally been.

"Not a bit. Said he'd have it built up again with bricks if the authorities said so, but if not, when the war is over he wanted to make a nice little door and all, and have it for a show-place."

"What it is to be a millionaire!" said Winona. "All he has to do is to wave his wand at a pile of bricks and it turns into a nice little door with a keeper and everything. Well, anyway, millionaire or not, he couldn't get anybody to cultivate this farm this year, and——"

"And it took us to do it! Don't be modest, Winnie," Billy Lee encouraged her.

The quartet, as usual, had gone off together to a corner of the porch, and were talking over things.

"Yes, it took us to do it," Winona admitted, laughing at herself. "After all, it was a pretty big chore for a lot of kids—for we aren't grown up!"

"I feel as old as the hills, after mothering a coop-

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ful of chickens all summer!" declared Louise. "Thank goodness, they're all on their way to the happy hunting grounds!"

"M'm, chicken pie!" said Billy, with no consideration whatever for the chickens.

"I wonder what we'll decide to do with the house?" mused Winona.

"We have to decide something," said Billy more soberly. "It's up to us. It has to go on working for the war."

"Of course!" said the girls.

"But the question is," said Tom, "what?"

"We haven't to decide alone?" said Winona dreamily.

"You and Marie are leaders—torchbearers," Billy reminded them. "You'll probably have a good deal to say about it."

"I wonder!" said Winona.

